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A pale, handsome, suffering face met her astonished gaze as she stood to recover her breath before speaking.—The Minister's Daughter, page 4.

(Frontispiece.)

THE MINISTER'S DAUGHTER:

AND

OLD ANTHONY'S WILL.

Tales for the Young.

BY

M. M. POLLARD,

AUTHOR OF "THE OLD FARM-HOUSE;" "THE BROTHER'S LEGACY," ETC., ETC.

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CONTENTS.

THE MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.

| | C | UVL | IEF | L I. | | | | |
|--------------------|-------|------|-----|------|---|---|---|------|
| A FIRST INTRODUCTI | on, | • | • | • | • | • | • | PAG: |
| | C | HAP | TER | II. | | | | |
| AT THE MANSE, | • | | ٠. | | • | • | • | 12 |
| | CH | IAP: | ΓER | III. | | | | |
| MISS MACREEN, | • | | | • | • | • | • | 25 |
| | CH | IAP: | ΓER | ıv. | | | | |
| SOPHIA'S ROOM, | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | 34 |
| | С | HAF | TER | v. | | | | |
| A SUNDAY AT THE M | ANSE | , | • | • | • | • | • | 45 |
| | CH | IAP: | ΓER | VI. | | | | |
| | Name. | | | | | | | -0 |

| iv | COI | VTE | EN 2 | TS. | | | | |
|--------------------|-----|-------------|------|------|-----|-----|---|------------|
| GOING BACK, . | - | APTI | | | • | • | | PAGE 71 |
| | СНА | PTE | r V | III. | | | | |
| THE WREATH OF LINE | Æns | , . | • | | • | • | • | 82 |
| | | | | _ | | | | |
| OLD A | NΤ | ΗC | NY | Z'S | w I | LL. | | |
| | СН | IAPT | ER | I. | | | | |
| THE NEW CHAIN PIE | R, | • | • | • | • | • | • | 91 |
| | СН | APT: | ER I | II. | | | | |
| THE DISPUTED WILL. | | • | • | • | • | • | • | 107 |
| | СН | APTI | ER I | II. | | | | |
| AT SIR HUGH'S, | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | 117 |
| | СН | APT | ER | IV. | | | | |
| DEPARTURE OF THE | "EM | ERAL | .D," | • | • | • | • | 129 |
| | СН | APT | ER | V. | | | | |
| WESTMERE PARK, | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | 141 |

CHAPTER VI.
SIR STEPHEN'S NEW ESTATE, 149

| | CONTENTS. | | | | | | | v | | |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|------|-------|---|---|---|-----|--|--|
| | CHAPTER VII. | | | | | | | | | |
| AT OAKDENE, . | | | • | • | • | • | • | 165 | | |
| | CH | I A PT | ER ' | VIII. | | | | | | |
| OAKDENE PEOPLE, | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | 177 | | |
| | CF | IAPI | ER | IX. | | | | | | |
| THE OLD CHURCH, | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | 190 | | |
| | (| CHA | PTEI | R X. | | | | | | |
| TARY BANNERWAN'S | DY A | MC | | | | | | 201 | | |





THE MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.

| · | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | • | | |
| | · | | |
| | | | |
| | | | · |
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THE MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.



THE

MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

A FIRST INTRODUCTION.

ESSIE Muir opened the little wicket gate that led from her father's glebe lands to the shore, and, standing on the brow of the hill, she paused to look at the scene that greeted her.

There was a lull in the wind now, but the day had been wild and stormy, and the sea still chafed and fretted against the rocks, tossing its waves, with their crests of foam, roughly and angrily on the shore, and roaring with some remains of its former fierceness.

The sun was setting "angrily," and heavy

masses of clouds, deeply tinted with crimson and purple, showed the storm was not over yet. Wild cries rose from the restless sea birds as they flew rapidly past, now skimming with graceful wing the surface of the waters, and again swooping away far overhead.

Jessie looked at all this with a critical eye. "We shall have more rough weather to-night," mused she; and then she set out for her usual walk.

She was forced to go alone, for no one else in the manse ever seemed to have time for mere walks of recreation; her father was either visiting among his people, or shut up in his study, and her mother had her hands constantly full of work with those four big boys of hers. There was either some clothes to be made or patched for them, or some household duty to be seen to. Excuses were so frequent on the maternal lip, that poor Jessie had given up asking mother "to take a walk with her," and generally set out with no companion but her own thoughts.

Many a dream of girlish ambition and hope rose in her mind, as she trod the lonely seashore. Often and often she had looked with longing eyes at the high hills that seemed to shut in the deep bay of Forling, and wondered what the world was that lay beyond them.

Bright and beautiful, no doubt. There were scenes of life and activity there, such as she could never experience in that remote country parish; and the truth must be told, Jessie often longed to spread her untried wings to see the bright world, and find out what it was like. She built up an airy castle for herself this evening as she rambled along, and she had nearly put the finishing stroke to the structure, and decided that all was to end pleasantly, and everybody was to be happy ever afterwards, when an unexpected sight made her pause, and brought her down to every-day life again.

At the end of the long sandy beach, there was a projecting point of steep rocks that stretched far out into the bay. The side near the shore sloped gradually down to the sand, and was very easy of access when the tide was out; but at high water, the treacherous sea closed round the base of these rocks, and made them, for the time being, a rugged island.

On the very top of this point was seated a lady, dressed in some light costume, with a parasol, and a book by her side; and the lady

4 THE MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.

was looking far out on the deep waters, apparently unconscious that the tide was fast isolating the rocky point, and that she would soon be placed in a very awkward predicament.

In a very short time, her retreat to the land would be cut off, and she would either have to remain there half the night till the tide turned, or have to be taken away by a boat, and, alas! there were none nearer than Forling Harbour, quite four miles away.

Jessie comprehended all this in a minute. Her rapid glance saw the water was already gurgling pretty deeply round the shore side of the point, and she rushed to the rescue, calling out loudly as she ran along.

The lady calmly turned round when she heard Jessie's voice, but did not attempt to move. Neither shouting nor sign seemed to produce any impression, so at last Jessie made a vigorous leap, crossed the water with a bound, and stood panting beside the strange apparition.

A pale, handsome, suffering face met her astonished gaze, as she stood to recover her breath before speaking.

" If you don't make haste and get down from

here, you'll be too late. The sea's getting deeper every minute."

"Is there any danger? I hope not, for I can't walk a step. I've just sprained my ankle, and it gives me agonies to move," was the reply.

"But you must come," exclaimed Jessie with energy. "This place is quite cut off from the shore at high water, and it's spring-tide now. You must come; please try."

The lady half rose, and then sank back to her seat with a cry of pain. "I can't walk! I must stop here! Don't let me keep you, though."

"But you don't know this place," said Jessie, nearly frantic. "It would frighten you out of your wits to have to stay on this lonely rock all night. Do make an effort to move. Do, do; I'll help you."

Another attempt, and this time with more success; for, after the sharp agony of sudden movement was over, the stranger stood upright, and leaning heavily on Jessie, found she could move along.

The water had grown deeper during this short colloquy, so that when they reached the end of the rocks the waves were sweeping noisily round and the depth was considerable. "Oh! how I wish Archie was here," said Jessie, looking despairingly at the chimneys of the manse that were just visible through the straggling fir-trees.

But no friendly hand was near to help; and watching the opportunity when the waves receded, the two girls gave a plunge, a scramble, and finally emerged, and found themselves up on the shore, wet, pale, and trembling.

"I'm glad we are over," exclaimed Jessie, as the water poured from her dripping skirts. "What an unfortunate adventure!"

"I think everything in this horrid place is unfortunate," replied her companion, moodily. "I've only been here three days; two of them I was kept a prisoner by the storm, and the very first time I ventured out for a walk, I not only hurt my foot, but was nearly shut out on a desert island."

There was a good-natured expression in her face, as she thus detailed her misfortunes, that won Jessie's heart at once, and made her contemplate the stranger with some interest.

She was very tall, with dark hair and eyes, and was dressed in some shiny, light material, the cut and fashion of which was totally unknown in those remote regions.

"Are you living near here?" inquired Jessie, timidly.

"I am staying for a short time at my aunt's, Miss Macreen."

"Oh! at Moorfields," returned Jessie, with some degree of awe. She had called at Moorfields once or twice, when her mother had been paying formal visits there, and was duly impressed with the grandeur and dignity of the place. The stately rooms, rich furniture, and handsome pictures, had left a very vivid impression on her mind, and she looked curiously at the young lady who was a guest at such a grand place.

"How far is Moorfields from here?"

"It is nearly two miles and a-half by the road," replied Jessie, "and rather less across the fields; but I don't think you could manage to get over the stiles with your sprained ankle."

"I'm quite sure I couldn't," replied the stranger, as she gave one or two very evident limps forward. "My foot pains me dreadfully. I shall never be able to walk to Moorfields. Oh! dear, I must sit down on the bank for a minute or two. This place looks dreadfully dreary, nothing to be seen but those screeching birds—what a noise they make! Are they all sea-gulls?"

"Some of them are divers and curlews; did you go out on the point to watch the birds?"

"I went out there to look for sea anemones, for I thought there might be some clear, deep pools on the top."

"Oh! that is not a good place for pools," replied Jessie, with her superior knowledge. "The sea never rises as high as the top, so it is always quite dry and bare. I could show you some splendid pools on the other side, with hundreds of sea anemones of all sizes and colours. Do you know the 'Actinoloba dianthus?"

"I can't say I do; what colour are they?"

"Sometimes they are pure white, and sometimes they have just a tint of bright rose colour. I wish you could see them; when they are fully open they look just like a carnation."

"They must be very pretty, and I should think a very rare kind."

"Yes, they are not easily found, even here; but we have numbers of the 'Tealia Crassicornis,'" continued Jessie, with animation; "they are most curious, and have thick horns, and are quite transparent, with bright coloured rings."

"You seem to know all about them; I wish I had met you before," exclaimed the young lady, rubbing her ankle, "and then I should have escaped this fall. Oh! dear, how painful my foot is. Who teaches you Latin?" and she turned curiously to her companion.

"Oh! my father; I used to take lessons with the boys," replied Jessie with a slight blush.

"I think I have rested enough, and will try to walk now, though I am sure I could never reach Moorfields! What had I better do? can you assist me by finding some one who would go to my aunt's and order the carriage to come for me?"

"Will you come into the manse and wait?" asked Jessie, hesitatingly. "We live very near here, just at the end of the beach; that little green gate yonder opens into the glebe."

"I dare say I could manage that distance, if you will let me lean on you; but I am not much in trim for company; my feet and dress are dripping wet."

"Please, don't mind that, Miss Macreen," said Jessie, encouragingly. "I am quite as wet as you are."

"Oh! don't call me 'Miss Macreen!'" said

the young lady laughing; "that's not my name, I'm happy to say. I'm called Gertrude Stanhope. Is your father a clergyman?"

"He's the minister of Forling," replied Jessie; "you can see the church when we get a little farther on; ours is a very straggling parish, but there are not many inhabitants in it, only about four hundred, or so."

"I shouldn't think you were overburdened with population in these parts. It looks very bare of houses and people. By-the-bye, I think I must have seen your father; isn't he very tall, very grave, and very solemn; and doesn't he speak in a low, melancholy tone of voice?" asked Gertrude. "A clergyman of that description had a long audience with my aunt this morning, and I think she told me he belonged to Forling Church."

"Oh! that was Mr Wilson of Forling Harbour Church," replied Jessie, recognising the description at once. "My father is not a bit like him, for he is the brightest, kindest, most genial of men—not the least dull or melancholy—though he does study very hard, and spends hours shut up with his books."

"I must rest now!" exclaimed Gertrude, lean-

ing on the gate, before Jessie opened it. "How quiet every thing looks! Have you a mother living? and sisters and brothers?"

"I have four brothers, one older than myself, my mother is in-doors, and will be glad to see you; perhaps she may know of something that will cure your sprain, for she doctors half the people in the parish."

Leaning heavily on Jessie's arm, Miss Stanhope went in at the gate, round a clump of trees, through a long kitchen garden, and then they paused at the manse door.





CHAPTER II.

AT THE MANSE.

RS MUIR was seated at the window, doing her best in the gathering twilight to finish off the heel of one of the boys' stockings. She had silver rimmed spectacles on, and glanced over them a little startled, at the sudden entrance of her daughter with a fashionable-looking young lady.

"Oh! mother, such an accident!" exclaimed Jessie, abruptly. "Miss Gertrude Stanhope has hurt her ankle very much, and we are both so wet!"

Mrs Muir rose from her seat, and went towards them. She was a mild, anxious-looking woman, with deep lines on her brow, and a general look of delicacy about her, that might, perhaps, account for her so often declining to share Jessie's walks, and make her choose rather to sit at home, brooding over her endless work. With a few motherly questions, she soon made herself acquainted with all the facts, and then, with ready thought, suggested remedies.

"Come into my room, Miss Stanhope, and I shall soon be able to tell you the extent of your injury. I am sorry you found our rugged rocks so dangerous, but I suppose you are not much used to climbing. Run away Jessie, and take off your wet clothes, or I shall have you to doctor next."

A careful survey soon showed the sprain on the foot, though acute, was not serious—a few days' rest would set all to rights again. Mrs Muir brought her rhus-tox lotion, applied some soft linen folds well saturated with it to the injured part, then put on a slight bandage, and pronounced it would do for the present.

Then she opened her wardrobe and took out some clothes.

"I cannot allow you to remain in those wet garments any longer, Miss Stanhope; my things are not very fine or fashionable, I know, but they are fresh and warm, so pray put them on; it is growing dark now, so no one will notice the metamorphosis," added she, smiling.

Gertrude thankfully laid aside her draggling flounces; and laughing merrily at her short nar-

row skirts, she followed Mrs Muir back to the sitting-room.

Jessie was already there. She was busy cutting bread and laying out the table. The fragrance of the steaming coffee filled the room, and was very pleasant to the weary guest.

"I'm glad you've made the coffee," said Mrs Muir, approvingly; "a hot cup of it will do Miss Stanhope good. Run away to the study, Jessie, and call your father; we won't wait for the boys this evening."

"My three youngest boys read with our neighbour, Mr M'Lean's lads," explained Mrs Muir, when Jessie left the room; "they are all much about the same age, so the one tutor teaches them."

"That must be a great convenience," suggested Gertrude.

"Yes, and it saves expense too. The tutor's a good, laborious, hard-working man, and gets them on well with their Greek and Latin. My husband used to teach them, but it was very hard on him, with all the parish work, so I'm very glad he's free from teaching now."

"Have you only three sons?" asked the young lady, who began to like the kind, motherly face, that was opposite her.

"My eldest boy is at the Glasgow University. Poor fellow! he's had a dull time of it at the lonely lodging-house he's been staying at; but Hector M'Lean is going to college very soon, and then they'll share the same apartments. It will be better for them both to live together."

Gertrude had been glancing round the room, and taking in all the details with her quick eye.

The furniture was plain and substantial, more fitted for use than show. There was not a single luxury or ornament in the place, except the pictures of some very grave divines who frowned down on them from their high position on the whitewashed walls,—except they might have been called ornamental.

The floor was covered with grey drugget, and the chairs and sofa with shining black horse-hair. In the centre of the room was the table, with its neat tea equipage, and the light of the small lamp mingled its rays with those of the fading twilight which stole in through the uncurtained window.

Presently Jessie returned, and said her father was coming directly.

"I'm afraid I can't stay to see him," said Gertrude, half rising; "my aunt will be getting uneasy about me. I must try and get to Moorfields somehow."

"Oh! I have settled all about that," exclaimed Jessie with a quick blush, as she bent over the table.

"Hector M'Lean happened to come in while you were in the bedroom with mother, and he offered to go; he ran across the fields, and I'm sure must be there by this time."

"How very kind of him! but I hope he will use caution, and not let my aunt fancy anything very dreadful has happened to me."

"I told him to be careful about that; but indeed Hector would have understood, even if I had not warned him. He is very thoughtful and considerate."

And with a still brighter glow on her cheek, Jessie began to busy herself with pouring out the steaming coffee, and adding some rich cream to it.

Never had Gertrude tasted anything that seemed so grateful. The strain on her nerves had made her feel half-faint and sick, so the fragrant beverage roused her, and she began talking in her usual lively manner.

Mr Muir came in after a while. He had evi-

dently made his preparations in a hurry, for his spectacles were pushed up, and rested on his forehead, and the front lock of his hair was nearly perpendicular, from the constant pulling he was in the habit of giving it, while deeply immersed in study.

"My dear! you've forgotten to take off your glasses," exclaimed Mrs Muir, while her husband peered with half-closed eyes at the stranger.

He was dreadfully near sighted, and it was not till he had adjusted his spectacles again, that he was able to get a satisfactory view of the young lady.

He was a tall, slight, studious-looking man, with thin grey hair, gentle blue eyes, and a nervous, fidgetty manner; but go where you might, it would be hard to find a match for his warm, loving heart, and his kind, genial manner. He was eminently the father of his people, and not a rough shepherd or old wife in the parish but liked to have a talk with their minister. Highly cultivated himself, and with a mind that could grasp any amount of scholarship and learning, he could yet content himself in that out-of-the-world place, and talk and teach among his simple, unlettered people. From year to

vear he had been dwelling among them, occupying himself with hard, self-denying labour, and almost forgetting the big world in which his youth had been spent.

Not a cottage or home from one end of Forling to the other, but could boast of frequent visits from their minister: the poor were helped and cared for, the idle were admonished, and the sick were soothed and comforted in their hour of need.

Making his way over to Gertrude Stanhope, he shook hands warmly with her, and then seated himself at the table.

- "Jessie told me of your accident," said he. "Have you hurt your foot much?"
- "I believe I was more frightened than hurt," replied she frankly. "The pain is much less now, and I daresay will be gone altogether by to-morrow."
- "You must be careful, though," rejoined Mrs Muir, anxiously, "and not walk much for some time. I should like to confine you to the sofa for a week, at least."
- "Oh! whatever should I do there? I should die of dulness in far less than a week," replied she, laughing. "Aunt already considers me in the light of a white elephant come on a visit to

her, and does not understand in the least what to do with me."

"Are you so very difficult to entertain?" asked Mr Muir, rather drily.

"I suppose I must be, for I feel my thoughts wandering here, there, and everywhere, while she is telling me some long story of her youth. Oh dear! I hope I shall never live to be old."

"Our times are in God's hand," replied Mr Muir, gravely. "Have you thought, my dear young lady, of the danger you were in not an hour ago? Do you know that many lives have been lost on that very point?"

"Is it possible?" exclaimed she, with sudden gravity.

"Yes, I remember one instance myself, and have heard of some others. Poor Hugh Macdonald, as fine a young fellow as one could meet with, was staying in this neighbourhood about five years ago, and he went out on the point, on just such an evening as this has been. There had been a series of heavy storms, and at the time I speak of there was a sudden lull, so he went out to the extreme end of the rocks to sketch the hues of a gorgeous sunset. Poor fellow! his painting was found on the point after-

wards, with its brilliant tinting of purple and orange, but he had gone then to where there are no more earthly sunsets."

"But how did it happen?" asked Gertrude, eagerly.

"I suppose he was so engrossed with his work that he did not perceive the tide was rushing round the shore end of the rocks. It forms a rapid current there at spring tide. Doubtless he grew frightened at finding himself thus cut off from the land, with the prospect of a dreary night on the rocks. He must have struggled to get across, but the tide and sweeping waves were too strong for him, and he was found the next morning bruised and dead on the shore."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Gertrude, while her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"If you went down there now you would find the passage quite impassable: the surge makes a clean sweep round the rocks during the high spring tides."

"How lucky it was your daughter happened to be walking in that direction! I was sitting there without even thinking it necessary to make a speedy retreat. How fortunate it was! I shall never be sufficiently grateful to you, Miss Muir;"

and she held out her hand to Jessie with great emotion.

"Lucky and fortunate!" repeated Mr Muir, slowly. "Are those fitting words, Miss Stanhope?" "Well, no; I believe I should say 'providential."

"Yes, a good Providence watched over you and saved you, and the more you think over your escape the more you will thank God for it."

"I am sure I should have gone out of my senses, and done something desperate, had I been caught on those horrid rocks, as poor Mr Macdonald was. Oh! what a narrow escape I had."

Here the door opened, and Hector M'Lean came into the room.

Blushing and awkward, he stood on the threshold announcing the carriage was waiting.

"Come forward, Hector, and take a cup of coffee with us," said Mrs Muir, kindly. "This is our neighbour, Hector M'Lean, Miss Stanhope;" and then the young man lifted his eyes and took a survey of the stranger.

"A good-looking lad," mused Gertrude to herself; "a fine countenance, but he's sadly wanting in polish: a mere rustic, in fact."

"I hope you remembered what I told you, and

did not alarm Miss Macreen," said Jessie, suddenly.

"Oh yes! I was very careful indeed," replied Hector, arresting his coffee on the way to his mouth, and spilling a portion of it on his hand; "I was very careful;" and he set the hot cup on the table.

"Who did you see, then?"

"Only Sandy Andrews, the groom, and he got the pony chaise ready and came off at once. I drove back with him."

"Did you hear if my aunt had missed me?" asked Gertrude, anxiously.

"I did not hear," replied Hector, who had now got a little over his shyness; "but I don't think she could have been very uneasy, for Sandy told me Mr Wilson of Forling Harbour went in to see her more than an hour ago, and he and Mrs Bently were still in the drawing-room with her."

"Oh! then, I dare say she never knows but what I returned home an age ago. I generally keep out of the way when those long discussions are going on," said Gertrude, laughingly, as she rose from the table to take her departure.

All gathered round her, and went in a body to the gate with her. Mr Muir walked bare-headed down the garden by her side, and as he pressed her hand at parting, he said in a low voice—

"Don't look on the events of this evening as a mere freak of chance, Miss Stanhope; look higher, and acknowledge the hand of a good and merciful God, who has saved you from a great peril."

"I will, I will; I shall never forget it," replied she hurriedly, and then Mrs Muir came forward with a warm shawl.

"You must let me put it round your shoulders, for these May evenings are very cold and chilly. I shall be glad to hear if my treatment agrees with your sprained ankle. Will you send me word, Miss Stanhope?"

"Of course I shall, and also come and thank you in person for all your kindness, as soon as my two or three days of rest are over. Miss Muir will call and inquire for me to-morrow, I hope," added she, nodding and smiling to Jessie as she drove away.

Gertrude thought over this adventure, as she called it, during her drive to Moorfields. As the old pony toiled up the rugged, hilly road, she turned round to take a glance at the sea, that was now tossing and seething in the moonlight.

A shudder passed over her as she looked at the cruel waves. How would it have been with her had she been left on the lonely rock till now? or how would it have been had her fate been that of poor Hugh Macdonald? Would she have been ready for the sudden call, ready to meet her God? She closed her eyes as she thought thus, and went over a mental survey of her life. Alas! there was no preparedness in it, and her inward scrutiny made her shudder even more than the sight of the hungry waves had done a few minutes ago.

More impressed by her train of serious thoughts than she had ever been in her life before, she hardly heeded the jolts the chaise made over the rough stones, and she was only brought to recollection by Sandy's jumping down to open the heavy Moorfield gates.

"Oh yes! God was good and merciful to spare me," she mused, as Sandy helped her down. "I am thankful to Mr Muir for putting me in mind of that; and he does seem the kind of man who could teach one many things. I like him, and I like his family. It shan't be my fault if I don't see them often while I'm staying here."



CHAPTER III.

MISS MACREEN.

ERTRUDE need not have been the least uneasy about her aunt's missing her, for Mr Wilson was only just gone, and the two ladies were sitting over by the fire, with their heads close together, talking about him.

Mrs Bently was an humble companion of the old lady, and had borne with her whims and fancies for many years past, and they had both grown old and deaf together. They quarrelled over their evening game of backgammon, and made up their quarrel, and were friends again before supper time. Not a delinquency or short coming took place in Forling Harbour parish but came to their hearing, and was duly talked over and commented on.

Poor Elsie Goring's misdemeanours were giving a piquancy to their discourse this evening; and as Gertrude limped slowly into the room, after having changed her costume, she heard Mrs Bently exclaim:

"I always distrusted her; I did indeed, ma'am! after I saw her with those bright pink ribbons in her cap. A girl that lets her thoughts run so much on dress and finery is sure to go wrong. Did Mr Wilson say she was really seen at Forling Fair?

"Yes, and with that ne'er-do-well fellow Jack Grahame. They were just roving about and laughing with each other like two big fools, as they are."

"It's very, very sad," said Mrs Bently, shaking her head.

"You are right there, Anna," continued Miss Macreen, with a deep sigh. "Elsie asked me if she might go home and sit with her sick mother, and I, like an unsuspicious idiot, filled her basket with arrowroot and shortbread, and told her not to hurry back, but to stay with the poor soul till dark; and there, she was off all the time exhibiting her silly self at the fair. Ah, me! this is a wicked world."

"It is indeed," rejoined Mrs Bently, with a responsive sigh. And then Miss Macreen looked over, and saw Gertrude sitting pale and quiet on a distant sofa.

"Come over here, my dear. I'm glad you've come down, for I want to consult you about that lass, Elsie Goring."

"Oh! those tiresome stories," thought Gertrude, as she rose and walked slowly across the room. "Aunt is never happy but when she can pounce on some poor delinquent or other;" and she sat down with a resigned face to listen.

After the whole story had been related a second time, dragged out to a weary length, and commented on, Miss Macreen asked Gertrude's advice.

- "Now, what would you do with the girl?"
- "Send her away, of course," replied Gertrude, quickly.
- "Now there you are quite wrong, Gertrude. If I send her away, she is thrown on her mother's hands, and the poor woman is the real sufferer; for Miss Elsie will only be too pleased to get her fling, and have more time to dance about with that wretched 'callant,' Jock Grahame. Is that the best advice you can give?"
- "Well, then, auntie, if you only wish to punish the girl, you had better stop her leave and give her a lecture," replied Gertrude, wearily.
 - "Perhaps that would be the best plan. Mrs

Bently, my niece has some knowledge of things, you see; so you can give Miss Elsie a good hearing to-morrow morning, and when you have finished, you can send her to me."

"Poor Elsie!" thought Gertrude, with a slight shudder. And then she rose and said she felt rather tired, and would go to bed.

"But, Gertrude, my dear, we have not had tea yet. Ring the bell, if you please, Mrs Bently, and hurry that lazy fellow, Alec. He never will bring up the tray till the last minute."

"I've had my tea, auntie."

"Where did you get it?" asked Miss Macreen, in surprise. And then Gertrude related her history, while the two old ladies listened eagerly, calling out to her every now and then to speak louder.

"Well, my dear," exclaimed Miss Macreen, wiping her eyes, when Gertrude had finished, "I must say you have been very fool-hardy. I thought I was taking a great responsibility on myself when I told my niece, your mother, you might come here and stay for awhile; but I never thought you had so little sense as that. Who would ever have dreamt of your rambling off in that daft manner in a place you knew nothing

about! Looking for sea anemones indeed! Why, in my youth, we never troubled our heads about such hideous animal flowers; we had something more important to think about."

Miss Macreen stopped from want of breath, and wiped her eyes again. Gertrude thought her hard and cold, but she would have been surprised had she known what a tumult was at the old lady's heart, and how many thoughts of gratitude, and how many prayers were rising there for the safety of her niece.

"Old Archie Muir is a decent man," said Miss Macreen, when she had a little recovered: "and I shall send him a letter of thanks to-morrow for the kind attention he and his family have paid you. He's a good, honest creature, with no great spirit or energy; but I'm truly thankful to him; I am, indeed."

"May I ask Jessie Muir to come and see me to-morrow?" asked Gertrude, presently.

"Certainly, my dear. I'm very ready to give Archie, or any of his family, the hand of friendship. I haven't seen as much of them as I ought of late. But a good deal of my land lies in Mr Wilson's parish also, and he's more of a business man, and manages things for me, so I see him more frequently. He's not so much of a reader either; and being more of a practical turn, and a bachelor, he has more time to give to an old woman's gossip."

"I believe I shall go to bed now," said Gertrude, when her aunt stopped.

"Do, my dear, and I'll send Mrs Bently up to you with some hot-spiced negus. Will you promise me one thing, Gertrude?"

"Anything in reason, of course, I'll promise you," replied she, smiling.

"Never go on Hazard Point again; give me your word about that. You don't understand the ways of this place yet, and therefore can't know the dangerous spots."

"Oh! I shan't venture there again, aunt; you may depend on that. My curiosity is quite satisfied."

"Young Jessie Muir can be your guide in future. She's a wise-like girl, and won't lead you into any dangers. She's been well brought up by her worthy mother. Indeed, I must say all the Muirs are steady, good children, except that eldest lad Norman, who's now at Glasgow University.

[&]quot;What is wrong with him, aunt?"

"A meddlesome, roving lad, as ever was; he angered me very much once by breaking into my plantation. He was hunting for 'Emperor Butterflies,' as he called them; and when I told him about knocking down my stakes, and hurting my young larches, he showed me the creatures he was in search of. I threatened, of course, to pull his ears for him, and asked him what he was going to do with the wee insects, and he said he was going to 'classify them.' I really don't know what this generation is coming to; you let none of God's created things alone; you must hunt them down, and examine them, and put them into 'orders,' and 'species,' and 'kinds;' in my days, we left all that for a naturalist to do, and were quite contented to read his opinions on the subject; but now, everybody wants to dabble in science, and a pretty mess they make of it. Emperor Butterflies, and sea anemones, forsooth!" and Miss Macreen finished with such a burst of indignation, that Gertrude could not help laughing.

"This is the age of investigation and intellect;" replied she, much amused; "people are not contented with mere report now, we all like to examine and understand for ourselves. Why, there never were so many wonderful discoveries as are being found out in the present day."

"That may be, that may be, child; but they are not likely to be a universal good, I surmise. What have you gained by your investigations? nothing but a sprained ankle. I declare you are nearly as hard to manage as Elsie Goring. What young people are coming to I know not!"

"Oh! I think I had better go after that," said Gertrude, holding up her face to be kissed, and Miss Macreen smoothed out her wrinkles, and smiled benignly, as she drew her young niece towards her.

"God bless and protect you, my dear child! you must have patience with your old aunt. I'm growing hard and cross here in my solitary life, and I hardly know how to deal with a blythe young nature such as yours. I wish I could go about with you, and keep you from tumbling on dangerous rocks; but my day is over for that; and I am glad you have found out Jessie Muir; you won't think this place so lonely when you have her to walk and drive about with."

Though Gertrude partook of the hot negus Mrs Bently brought up, sleep would not shed its soft repose over her that night. The storm came on again with unwonted fury, and while the wind swayed the old trees round the house, she thought she heard the waves dashing in fury on the rocky shore.

Every time she fell into a slumber, she dreamed she was struggling in the water, and she repeated Mr Muir's words over and over again.

"Oh! I wish I could realise his meaning, and understand better the goodness and mercy of God, who saved me from danger—danger not only to my body, but to my immortal soul, for I am not ready to die, I am not prepared to meet my God!"

And these words rang with mournful cadence through her mind, and mingled with the sounds of the rough storm. She had not yet learned where to go for succour. The safety in Jesus the "Crucified One" had never yet been sought by her.





CHAPTER IV.

SOPHIA'S ROOM.

iss MACREEN'S house at Moorfields was large and old. It had been in her family for many years, and its history dated a generation or two back.

Sheltered as it was in its thick groves of oak and ash, and birch, it braved in safety the numerous storms that swept around those exposed coasts, and it dwelt secure, while the tempests howled fiercely round it.

At the back was a long range of hills, more than a thousand feet high, whose brown tops seemed often lost in mist and clouds; but round their base, and to a good height up their sides, one might see heather-thatched cottages scattered here and there, surrounded by their little patches of cultivation, their corn fields, and gardens. Hardy shepherds dwelt in these, whose simple, harmless lives, were passed in caring for the

wandering cattle, which often rambled up to almost impossible heights on the mountain.

Gertrude Stanhope was seated in the breakfast-room with her aunt the next morning. Her foot, still rather painful, was resting on a low sofa, and she had some dainty embroidery in her hand, for Miss Macreen was no friend to much reading or study, and seemed to consider it disrespectful for any one to be engrossed in a book while in her presence.

Gertrude soon found out this peculiarity, so she generally provided herself with some work, and then disposed herself to listen dutifully to all Miss Macreen's conversation.

But this morning, her answers fell rather at random, for her eyes were constantly wandering out of the window to watch the gate at the entrance of the lawn. She had written to Jessie Muir before breakfast, and she was momentarily expecting her arrival.

At last she appeared, her little figure looking trim and neat in its summer garb of blue muslin. She came in bright and glowing, looking like a very rosebud, as she took the chair Miss Macreen pointed out to her beside herself. It was Miss Macreen's habit, when entertaining company, to put on company manners. She would draw up her stately figure into a more rigid uprightness than ever. She would frown grandly, and jerk out her words in short sentences, thus raising up a barrier between herself and her guests, that often quite obscured her really true, warm nature.

She always made herself as much feared as loved, and many who looked no deeper than the surface, had gone away with hard thoughts of her.

In Forling Harbour parish, Miss Macreen's "dour" way was well-known, and in former days, her visits there had been regarded with mingled dread and satisfaction. While she soundly rated the old wives for their dirty habits, their extravagance, or their idleness, her hand was always ready to minister to their real wants, and her eyes ever ready to weep with them in their afflictions.

Jessie Muir sat primly on her chair, evidently very much impressed with the old lady's stately manners, and she answered her questions a little nervously, with glowing cheeks, and a subdued look in her soft blue eyes.

"And so Master Norman's at Glasgow University now, is he? I suppose your father intends he shall be a minister some day?"

"No, indeed," replied Jessie, "Archie's to be the minister; he has quite set his mind on it; Norman is studying for a doctor."

"Well, so much the better. That lad never seemed to have a calling for the Church. I haven't forgotten the time he scrambled over my fences and broke them, and then nearly knocked over some of my newly-planted young larch trees. The pulpit has a grand escape of him, I predict."

"But that was five years ago," replied Jessie, with a deeper flush, and her eyes sparkled as she took her favourite brother's part. "Norman is much wiser now; in those days, he and Archie were half-wild, hunting for their butterflies. We have three lovely cases of them at home that they arranged."

"Poor fools!" jerked out Miss Macreen, "they might have allowed the wee insects the full enjoyment of their short lifetime in peace."

"But then the 'wee insects' would have perished with the summer flowers," said Gertrude, coming to Jessie's rescue, "and now their beautiful tints are preserved; any one can study and examine them still: they have become a 'joy for ever.'"

"Gertrude, I often confess to you, this generation has gone far before me. I can't keep pace with its ways or its reasonings, and I know nothing of its doctrines or its metaphysics. It's all very different to the good old times when I was young; people had some sterling sense then."

But here, Miss Macreen's oration was brought to a sudden conclusion, for the door of the breakfast room opened, and in came Mrs Bently, followed by Elsie Goring, who looked very red about the eyes, and had a general appearance of deep dejection and despair.

" May Jessie and I go now, aunt?"

"Yes, go and try to amuse yourselves, as you best can, but don't walk too much, Gertrude, and persuade Jessie Muir to stay and take luncheon with you."

Nothing loath, the two girls made their escape, and the door closed on the two old ladies and the unfortunate delinquent, Elsie Goring.

Gertrude slowly led the way to a room in a distant part of the house—a bright, summery

room, that looked much more recently furnished than the other apartments.

A soft carpet, with a pattern of fern leaves and lilies of the valley intertwined, covered the floor; the curtains were green also, and round the walls were pretty landscapes in water colours. There were numerous books in white and gilt bookcases. On the table were albums, and the usual trifles that adorn a ladies' drawing-room. A cottage piano and harp were there also, and the sofas and chairs were covered with green damask.

Gertrude closed the door, and took up her position on a sofa that was drawn near the window, and from which one could command a view of extensive country and unlimited sea. Jessie sat down beside her, and both of them involuntarily glanced round the pretty apartment.

"This is Sophia's room," said Gertrude presently.

"What, the Miss Macreen that died four years ago?" asked Jessie, with some awe in her voice.

"Yes, and it has been dedicated to her memory ever since. I knew nothing about it at first, and I used to rove in and out here at my own free will, tumbling the books and disturb-

ing everything according to my fancy; but one evening I carried a pile of these books down to the drawing-room to read at my leisure, and then my aunt recognised them, and told me the history."

"I remember when she died," rejoined Jessie, "and I quite recollect her sweet, sad-looking face. She was very lovely, and they say her aunt almost idolised her."

"I am sure she must have done so; she lowers her voice and her eyes fill with tears even now when she speaks of her. You know she was my aunt's only brother's only daughter, and when her parents died, she was left as a sacred gift to Aunt Norah. Did you ever hear what caused her death? I never like to inquire."

"It was consumption," replied Jessie; "she just faded away like a summer flower; but oh! she was so happy—so longing to go and be with Christ, that I've heard my father say, it would have been cruel to regret her departure, and have wished to keep her longer here. But people think Miss Macreen still grieves for her, and has never been the same since: they say she has grown gloomy, and seems as if she would never set her affections on anything earthly again."

"I am afraid she will never set them on me, for I am a very unworthy successor to poor Sophia. I would give much to know that poor girl's secret; I can't imagine how death could give her thoughts of happiness. To me it seems an intense horror. I never realised my feelings on the subject till last night, and I could not help shuddering."

"Death would be a terror to us all," replied Jessie softly, "had not our Saviour removed its sting. He died that we might live."

There was silence for some minutes, and at last Gertrude roused herself and said;

"I only come to this room on sufferance, and with the promise that when I use anything here, I will replace it exactly as I found it, and never carry anything away to any of the other apartments. These are the only restrictions; else I may do as I please here. Do you like music, Miss Muir?"

"Very much; but I have not many opportunities of hearing it. We have an old piano at the manse, but its tone is nearly gone from age, for my mother had it when a girl. She has taught me to play a little. Oh! I wish you would sing or play for me."

"I shall be very glad to do so, if it will give you any pleasure," replied Miss Stanhope, as she looked at Jessie's animated face; and then she seated herself at the piano, and began a song in a rich contralto voice.

Jessie stood by her side admiringly, as the full, pure tones swelled through the apartment, and she thought for a moment of what Sophia's songs were now. Her voice had doubtless often echoed through this very apartment, but it had lost its earthly tones, and had gone to mingle in a choir where all is praise.

"I feel as if I could never sing anything lively in this room," said Gertrude, as she rose from the piano. "I hope my dismal ditty has not depressed you, but really I could think of nothing else."

"I like plaintive music so much the best," replied Jessie, "and I think one of my greatest ambitions is to hear some really good sacred music. I imagine the full burst of harmony in one of Handel's oratorios must give one a faint idea of what the music in heaven may be like. Oh! how I wish to hear the 'Messiah!'"

"Perhaps you will some day, if you really wish it so much," said Gertrude, as she looked at

her eager face. "It is quite refreshing to meet with any one ready to receive first impressions, and who is not weary of all these things."

"Could anybody ever be weary? I suppose you have heard the 'Messiah' very often, Miss Stanhope?"

"Dozens of times. I hear it three or four times every season. Don't fancy I tire of it, though; but I cannot bring back the feeling of enthusiasm with which I heard it first." And then returning to the sofa near the window, Gertrude grew a little confidential.

She told Jessie her home was in London—in Kensington; that she had two sisters, one older and one younger than herself; and that her mamma was the widow of Colonel Stanhope.

"We go out a great deal," said Gertrude, with a sigh and shrug of her shoulders. "You have no idea of the fatigue of a London season. I got away this year while it was at the very height, for I felt such an intense longing for quiet and peace, that I think I should have gone out of my senses, had not mamma allowed me to come to this place."

"I am sure your aunt is very glad to have you here," rejoined Jessie, at a loss what to say.

44 THE MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.

"I'm not so sure of that," answered the young lady with another shrug. "She had never known me before, and had not even seen my mother for twenty-four years, when she left Scotland on her marriage. No, my aunt took the news of my promised visit very coolly indeed; and I am not sure, even now, if she cares for having me with her. You see, we have not learned to understand each other yet. But there's the luncheon bell; I am so glad you have consented to stay."





CHAPTER V.

A SUNDAY AT THE MANSE.

N the next morning, when Jessie was dressing herself for church, the unwonted sound of wheels stopping at the gate made her go to the window and look out, and there she saw Gertrude Stanhope slowly dismounting.

Giving the last touch to her bonnet strings, she ran down at once to meet her at the door.

"I've come here to go to church with you," said Gertrude frankly; "my aunt gave me broad hints that I ought to go and listen to Mr Wilson, but I differed from her on that subject, and here I am."

"I am so glad you have come," replied Jessie; "and now I hope you will remain with us for both services. Will you stay and take some dinner with us, Miss Stanhope? My mother will be very pleased, and I will send back word by

Sandy that he need not call for you till the evening."

Gertrude gladly assented, and the two girls went into the drawing-room to wait for the rest of the family.

"I'm so delighted you're here to-day," said Jessie, brightly, "for Norman has come home, and you will see him; he is to stay a whole week with us."

Mrs Muir soon came into the room, in her neat Sunday garb, and she welcomed her guest with effusion.

After inquiries about the ankle, which were all answered satisfactorily, Mrs Muir suggested they should set off at once.

"It is only a short step across the glebe, and through the lane, Miss Stanhope, but it won't do for you to hurry—you might injure your foot again; so come on with me, the others will soon overtake us."

The pathways and roads leading to the church seemed all astir with the slowly gathering congregation. Gertrude looked with interest at the little groups of people, as they wended their way along.

They came down from the hills, across the valleys—old and young; shepherds with their

plaids round them, and girls with their brightcoloured ribbons.

The jingling bell was sounding over the fields and across the calm, blue sea, as the people poured continuously along the road-ways, and into the grass-covered churchyard.

Many a cordial greeting was exchanged, and many a friendly inquiry passed among them, as they overtook their kinsfolk and neighbours; but the look of all the people was reverent, and their voices were low and subdued. No harsh gossip, or loud laughter disturbed the ear, or formed a rude discord with the holy calmness.

As the ladies turned into the shady lane, the three manse boys overtook them, and Mrs Muir introduced them to Gertrude.

Archie, "the minister" that was to be, was a miniature likeness of his father—clever-looking, short-sighted, and shy, one who would doubtless carry off his hard-earned prizes in Latin and Greek, and win high honours for himself in his classes; but one whom no amount of success would render vain or self-opinionated.

The other lads were handsome, dark-eyed little fellows, who held the firm belief that their big brothers were patterns of perfection.

"This is my eldest son, Norman," said Mrs Muir, with pardonable pride, as a tall young man met them at the churchyard gate; and then Gertrude noticed the same family type in him, but polished and perfected, as it were, by his more extended intercourse with the world.

They all walked silently into the church together, and took their places in the large square manse pew.

Forling church was a large structure, weatherstained and ancient, but not with the antiquity that makes church architecture picturesque—an ugly building it was, and an ugly building it had ever been.

Gertrude's restless eyes wandered round the place, noting all that was new and strange to her. The bare, white-washed walls, devoid of all ornamentation; the old oak pews, and the crowd of primitively-dressed, attentive worshippers. The slow, untutored singing, where all the people sat, as the quaint, impressive words of the old version flowed forth—all this arrested her attention. But when Mr Muir's sermon began, her eyes and thoughts wandered no more.

He took for his subject the value of a human

soul—"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" As he went on with his earnest, fervid eloquence, Gertrude felt as if she could not let a word escape her: she listened with an eager, rapt earnestness.

The words were simple and touching, such as the humble but intelligent congregation could thoroughly understand and appreciate, and yet such as would satisfy the most refined ear, and touch the most inquiring heart.

When he paused, rather suddenly, leaving the poor human soul in the midst of its sins, and only just awakening to a sense of its danger, Gertrude shuddered, as she thought to herself—"That would have been my case had I perished on the rocks the other night."

But the subject was not finished; the second part was to follow in the afternoon, and nearly all the morning's congregation would be present to hear it.

Some of them remained in church during the short interval between the services; others of them walked in the fields, and partook of the slight refreshment they had brought from a distance with them.

Some of the weakly poor people gathered in the manse kitchen, and had a meal given them; and a few of the respectable farmers joined the family round the large table in the manse dining-room.

It was all a new scene to Gertrude, and she looked on with great interest.

Norman took his father's place at the table, for Mr Muir always spent the interval of time in his study, where a cup of his favourite coffee was carried to him. He was never visible between the services, so Norman carved the huge piece of cold roast beef, and acted as master of the ceremonies.

There was nothing on the pure, white tablecloth but the beef, some bread, and glasses of icy cold water: no attempt at any other variety, and no apology at the plainness of the fare.

It seemed to be the usual thing, and all ate and enjoyed the meal. Gertrude Stanhope enjoyed the primitive hospitality also.

A real feeling of sympathy seemed to exist between the guests and the minister's family. Mrs Muir evidently knew all their circumstances, and inquired, with a motherly kindness, for the absent members of the various households, as one who loved and cared for them.

In the afternoon, all resumed their places in the church, and then Mr Muir finished his subject.

If the former part had been gloomy and painful, the conclusion was joyful and triumphant, for he told of the soul redeemed and saved by the blood of Jesus. He told of the wonderful price that had been paid for it, when the only begotten Son of God came to die that it might live; and then he led their thoughts on to the joy in heaven over "one sinner that repenteth."

Gertrude's eyes filled with tears as she listened; she drew herself up in a corner of the pew, and hoped no one would notice her emotion; and, then, for the first time in her life, a heart-felt prayer rose from her heart, that she might be one of the redeemed ones, and that Christ's death might not have been in vain for her.

When the parting hymn was over, the people set out for their distant homes, some of them far off at the ends of the parish, and others up among the cottages on the mountains.

Gertrude returned to the manse, and Mr Muir emerged from his study, and joined them at the afternoon tea. He had the remains of the cold roast beef on the table beside him, and he carved his share, while he talked over the events of the day.

He was a true pastor among his flock, and the slightest incidents of their simple lives were not uncared for by him.

His boys seemed to have found their tongues also at that social, family meal; genuine love and cheerfulness sparkled forth from each heart, and gave a charm to their conversation.

Without being in the least pedantic, they did not shrink from very deep and striking subjects, and Gertrude could not but observe how really genuine their religious faith appeared; it seemed to hallow their domestic intercourse, and to develop a strong bond of sympathy among them.

How different from the worldly, shallow conversation of her own family at home! Had the two families been inmates of two separate spheres, there could not have existed a greater contrast between them.

Gertrude thought over all this, as she wandered after tea with Jessie in the manse garden.

There was a little arbour there, rude and rustic, but which was a favourite retreat of Jessie Muir's, when she wanted a quiet place for reading in, and hither she led her new friend.

The manse garden was not celebrated for elegance or luxuriance, for the boys did most of the work, and their ideas of gardening savoured far more of the useful than the ornamental.

Some hardy flowers were coming into bloom, and Jessie pointed out some fuchsias that had been dragging out a languid existence in the beds all the winter, but were now struggling into something like vitality.

"Ah! we miss your warm southern climate," said she, pointing out her pets. "Delicate things won't flourish in this exposed situation; the rough sea breezes cut them up dreadfully. But our scenery is far grander than yours; don't you think the view from this garden is very fine?"

And fine, indeed, it was! Behind them were the towering hills, whose very tops were illumined with tints of gold and purple; and before them was the broad sea, all lighted up with the golden rays of the setting sun. It was calm and still now, like a giant hushed to sleep, and the two girls stood silently looking down on it.

"You can see 'Hazard Point' stretching out like a great, grim island,' said Jessie, laughing.

"Yes, there would be very little chance of

escape from it now. I wonder why I was more fortunate than the Mr Macdonald your father speaks of? I dare say his life would have been far more useful than mine will be. Do you know I almost feel inclined to envy him!"

"Ah! Miss Stanhope, don't say that?" said Jessie, looking shocked; and she turned gravely to her brother Norman, who had just joined them.

"What has life done to offend you, Miss Stanhope?" asked he, smiling; "don't you believe that 'man is immortal till his work is done?"'

"Yes, of course, for those who have any work to do that is worthy or noble in its nature; but my experience of life is very aimless and indefinite. One's whole time is taken up with trifles, so that when we pass away, not a creature in the wide world is the better for our having lived."

"Perhaps you have not found out your work yet, Miss Stanhope," replied Norman, with some earnestness. "There may be wonderful heights of usefulness and duty in store for you, but you have not reached them yet. When your time for work comes, I think you will be ready."

"I don't know about that," said Gertrude, wearily; "sometimes I feel very tired of it all. There is a great emptiness in our London life; it is made up of excitement and depression. You have no idea here of the endless visiting and gossip, the petty ambitions, the vain display, and the selfish grasping we go through. I sometimes long to be away from it all."

"That feeling is a sign of hungering after better food," replied Norman gravely; "it is a good thing when one wearies of the chaff and husks of life."

"I wish I could believe that!" exclaimed Gertrude, clasping her hands, while her face was lit up with a sudden glow. "I should like my whole life to be such as this day has been. So calm! so beautiful! I never knew what a Sabbath rest meant before."

"I don't think a life made up of days like this would be good for any of us, Miss Stanhope.

Our Sabbaths here are but halting places on our journey—they are a sweet foretaste of heavenly rest, I grant you; but in this work-a-day world we must rouse to action; we have no sanction anywhere for trying to make our life a scene of constant rest."

"Now you have come back to the working question again," said Gertrude; "I shall begin to think you are an advocate for woman's rights and woman's mission."

"So I am," replied Norman, with a smile; "I think woman's mission a noble one; hers is essentially a work of influence, and if she understood it properly, society would be very different to what it is now. If every woman was wise, and dignified, and noble, and religious, there would be very few really bad men in the world. Let women give their sympathy to what is grand and good, and the whole standard of the nation's character would be raised. This is the mission I advocate, and the rights of universal respect and admiration would follow. But I have drifted away into a deep subject. What are you thinking so gravely about, Jessie?"

"I was only wondering how Miss Stanhope could really grow tired of London."

Gertrude laughed, "Have you set your heart on seeing the beauties of the great city, Miss Muir?"

"I should like it so much. I should delight in getting a glimpse of the grand buildings and wide streets."

"Why, you would lose yourself there, you

'babe in the wood," replied Norman. "You would soon get bewildered, and out of your depth."

"But I don't wish to go there alone; I should like to be with people who would keep me from all risks, and show me everything worth seeing."

"You shall go with me, then, when I am a rich man, and in practice as a physician; but I would advise you to curb any undue impatience, for you will have a very long time to wait."

"I don't think your sister need wait nearly as long as that," replied Gertrude, with a sudden thought. "Miss Muir shall go to London with me when I return home; that is, if her friends will trust her to my guidance, and I will promise to show her numbers of pretty things in one month!"

"Oh! that will be delightful! charming!" exclaimed Jessie, with her eyes sparkling, and her cheeks all brilliant with animation. lingering ray from the setting sun lay lovingly among her bright hair, and she looked so pretty and innocent, that Gertrude's heart warmed towards her, as it rarely did to those who came in her way.

Thus were the first links of the chain formed and thus the friendship began that was afterwards to influence much of their future lives.



CHAPTER VI.

THE HOME IN KENSINGTON.

FEW days after this, Henrietta Stanhope was seated in the back drawingroom of Gertrude's home. She was a

tall, showy brunette—like her sister in figure and features, but altogether wanting in the pleasing expression of countenance that made Gertrude so attractive.

But, perhaps, it was not fair to judge her just then, for she was puzzled and dissatisfied.

On the table before her, lay a white evening dress, and she was occupied in taking off the pearly-white trimmings, and putting on lemon ones. Neither the result nor the work pleased her, for she detested having recourse to such 'mean contrivances,' as she called them.

In the habit of visiting with people who were a dozen times richer than herself, and not wishing to be behind them in variety of costume, Henrietta's dress was a perpetual worry to her; and she continually thought with envy of her many friends who could have new things as often as they pleased. They also had a servant to tend solely on themselves, while poor Henrietta was forced to share with her mother and sister the services of one unfortunate lady's maid.

She was brooding over all these troubles, and putting the last bows on her dress, when the door opened, and Ethel Stanhope came into the room.

"Have you heard of Gertrude's last whim?" said she, with a kind of sneer.

"No, indeed! what is it?" asked Henrietta, putting down her work. "You surely are not going to tell me she has broken it off with Sir Jennings Holt?"

"Not quite so bad as that, yet. Perhaps that event will follow. She has taken a great fancy to some people at Forling, and is going to bring a girl called Jessie Muir back here with her."

"Some friend of Aunt Macreen's, I suppose. No doubt she wants to curry favour with the old lady by making much of her visitors."

"Nothing of the sort, this girl is the minister's daughter, and Gertrude's laudation of her, and indeed of all her family, is something marvellous to comtemplate."

"What does mamma say about it?" asked Henrietta, while she sorted some artificial flowers, and began to form them into a wreath.

"Mamma is wonderfully quiet about the matter. I conclude she is afraid of aggravating Gertrude, lest she should throw up her engagement altogether. No dcubt mamma thinks it best to humour her just now."

"Well, 'some people have favours thrust upon them,' and Gertrude is one of the fortunate ones. She gets everything, and yet she is never contented. Half the girls I know, would be proud to make the match she is having, and yet she complains in the most sentimental way, and rushes away for change of air and scene. I wonder she is not ashamed to make such a fuss!"

"I wish Sir Jennings had selected you!" rereturned Ethel, with a laugh, as she seated herself beside the table, and began turning over the flowers. "Would you have accepted him?"

"I would do anything to get rid of this mean altering and contriving," replied Henrietta, with impetuosity. "Yes, anything that would give me decent clothes and a proper position. I'm sick of trying to keep up appearances!"

"I hear the St Ledgers are having some splendid new dresses for the ball to night," rejoined Ethel, a little maliciously.

"I suppose they are," replied her sister; "money is no object to them. I wish I could say the same for myself, for I hate exhibiting the same dress so often. I've worn this one four times already within a month. By-the-bye, shall we be expected to take Jessie Muir about with us?"

"I suppose we shall; and you will have to give up your seat in the carriage, when we go out to parties—being the youngest, of course-you must be the one to make a sacrifice."

"But I don't intend doing so. How tiresome Gertrude always is! Why does she bring a stranger here? I'm sure there are girls enough in the house already," and Henrietta tossed the finished wreath on the table.

"I don't think Sir Jennings is very well pleased at Gertrude's staying away so long," rejoined Ethel, shortly after. "He inquired about her at dinner yesterday, and said he was not aware how much longer time she intended

remaining at Forling; and he complained of her writing him very short letters. I really think the old stupid will go down there, if she does not soon return."

"Oh! that would make Gertrude furious. I hope he will not venture to do that."

Here the footman came to the side-door of the room, and announced visitors, the "Dowager Lady St Ledger, and the Miss St Ledgers," had called.

"Is mamma gone in to see them?" asked Ethel.

"No, miss, she desired me to tell you she was busy writing letters, and said you would go in and apologise for her," and the man withdrew.

"You can go in, Henrietta," said Ethel throwing herself back in her chair with a languid air.
"I feel dreadfully tired this morning."

"Indeed I shall not, Ethel," returned her sister, with more warmth than politeness; "that would be the 'last straw, and would break the camel's back,' metaphorically. In other words, I could not trust myself to listen to the description of all their splendid new dresses, which they are sure to whisper in confidence—I mean the girls will. I should hate my own contrivances more than ever. No, you must go in!"

Ethel was generally sure to give way to her more impetuous sister, and she yielded in this case, not without a warm discussion, that might have been called wrangling among young ladies less fashionable than the Miss Stanhopes were.

Ethel, however, smoothed her ruffled brow, swept across the back drawing-room, opened the large folding-doors, and went in to meet the guests with her usual charming smile and graceful manners.

Oh! how much folly, vanity, and jealousy lurks under the spacious veil of fashionable manners! What over-acted softness hides real ill-temper! What meaningless words cover envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness!

But we must return to Gertrude, who was spending her time very pleasantly indeed. Driving about the country with Jessie Muir for her companion, she seemed to have begun a new life.

Like one who had set aside all that was unpleasant, and was determined to forget it, she gave herself up to the pure, innocent enjoyments of country life. Better thoughts were awakened in her mind than she had ever known before; her constant intercourse with a girl like Jessie was doing her good, and unconsciously her nobler nature was throwing off its conventional trammels, and beginning to assert itself. One thing certain, Gertrude never could return to her former self again, for her eyes and heart had been enlightened, and she had learned the folly of trusting to things that "are not what they they seem."

The beauty of religion had been revealed to her, and she longed—oh! so deeply—to embrace it with all her powers.

The last day of Norman's vistt arrived, and Jessie was early at Moorfield with an invitation for Gertrude to join them in a boating party.

The manse boys were to row them to visit an old castle situated near the water's edge on a point of land far beyond Hazard point.

"I hardly like to let you go," said Miss Macreen in her abrupt way. "Are you quite sure you won't be tumbling down and hurting your foot again?"

"I'll do my very best to avoid such a catastrophe," replied Gertrude laughing; "and besides I shall have Jessie to take care of me."

"Well, there's some reason in that. Jessie is a good little thing, but she has an over responsibility in taking care of you; but you may go, Gertrude;" and with this consent, her niece promised to drive down early and meet the boating party.

It was a lovely June afternoon, the sea as smooth as glass, and the little party set out in high spirits. Archie and Hector M'Lean pulled, and Norman sat in the stern of the boat to steer.

It was rather intricate navigation, for every here and there a huge rock lifted up its head out of the calm water, as they coasted along almost under the shadow of the high hills that skirted the side of the bay; but Norman knew every inch of the path, and steered them carefully. When they reached their place of destination, the boat was made fast, and they all landed. Gertrude rambled over the old castle with much interest, while Norman told them the stirring legend connected with it,—a sad tale of man's bravery, and of woman's devotion, even to death.

The boys scrambled about everywhere, for they were great antiquaries in their way; and thoroughly investigated the old, crumbling, ivygrown place; while Norman found a sheltered seat for Gertrude and his sister, and stretched himself on the grass beside them.

"There are some splendid Linnæa plants in the fir-wood yonder," said Archie, running up to them, when he was tired of his examination of the ruin. "I vote we go and gather some."

"I don't think Miss Stanhope ought to walk so far," said wise Jessie, exerting her authority.

"I will stay behind, then; but don't let me prevent anybody else from going; the glorious view here will fully occupy me, and I shan't miss you in the least."

But Norman would not hear of her being left in solitude.

"They may all go into the woods if they choose, but I shall mount guard here. May I stay with you, Miss Stanhope?"

"Oh! if you are afraid to trust me here alone, remain by all means," replied Gertrude laughing; "but what will you do to amuse me?"

"I will read you 'Enoch Arden,'" said he, taking a small book out of his pocket.

"I shall like that, for I have never read it yet; but first, tell me of the 'Linnæa' they are going to hunt for. You have legends about everything; is there none about this flower?" "There is not exactly a legend about it, but the 'wee flower,' has a history, and we are rather proud of it. Linnæus himself selected the little northern plant to bear his own name. Among all the gorgeous blossoms he met with in his botanical researches, he deemed this one alone worthy of the high honour."

"But why did he choose it?"

"I don't know, except that it might have struck him as being emblematic of his own history—it is little, much overlooked, and unheeded, yet it lights up the gloomy fir-woods with its delicate pink bells, and it flowers early in the season, trailing over the barren ground, and perfuming the air before most of the other blossoms have wakened from their winter's sleep."

"Does it never grow in England?"

"Only in one place, I believe, and that is somewhere in Northumberland. Linnæus must have discovered it in our northern forests more than a hundred years ago, and here it still remains, bearing the name of that great leader in botany!"

Then Norman turned over the leaves of his book and began reading aloud, while Gertrude listened and looked far away out on the waters

where the white sails of passing ships shone out in the sunlight.

Norman read well, which is saying a good deal, for many people spoil the finest passages in the best poetry by their way of rendering it; and Gertrude found herself listening with intense interest to the closing lines, when the party emerged from the woods, laden with their wealth of flowers.

"How pretty they are!" said Gertrude, as she examined the pendulous blossoms; "I could imagine them to be little blue bells, turned pink, only that they grow two on a single stalk. What a fragrant perfume they have! Oh! I like vour northern flowers."

Norman's nimble fingers had been twining a wreath of them, which Gertrude accepted, and laughingly placed in her white hat—and then as the sun was beginning to dip at the horizon, a return home was proposed.

"We must take a wider course now," said Norman, "for the tide is getting low; shall you mind going further out to sea, Miss Stanhope?"

"I shall like it," replied she, "for I am a capital sailor, I believe, though I have never had much experience."

And then the boys rowed on, while gems of glory lit up the sunset sky, and reflected bars of gold on the placid water.

"Do sing something," said Norman, "I like to hear voices 'keep tune, while the oars keep time;' will you begin Jessie."

She accordingly, without the least shyness, began a hymn tune, and the boys joined their voices also. Hector M'Lean and Norman taking the bass.

All seemed to know the words, and Gertrude felt deeply impressed, as she listened:

"The Lord shall keep thy soul—He shall Preserve thee from all ill, Henceforth thy going out and in, God keep for ever will."

"Oh! that those words were prophetic," mused she, "and that I could realise them. I should no longer be worried and wretched as I am now."

Even while she thought thus, a calmness came over her, and her eyes filled with tears; she sat silent and motionless while they went on singing hymn after hymn, till at last the boat touched the shore, and they all prepared to land in the cool, grey twilight.

70 THE MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.

It was an evening Gertrude never forgot, and she only roused herself from her reverie to listen to Norman, who was wishing her 'good-bye.' "I start at daylight to-morrow," said he, as he helped her into the carriage. "I dare say you will be gone long before I return here again, and you will be apt to forget our Linnæa-like life and ways, when you are mingling among the hot-house specimens of society." He spoke gaily, but there was a lingering sadness in his eye, that Gertrude did not fail to remark.

"You are wrong, Mr Muir. I shall never forget either this place or its flowers;" and then, with more adieus and smiles, they parted.

"Or the lessons I have learnt either," mused Gertrude, as she took her solitary drive up the hill. "Whatever may be the end of it, I have been happier here than I ever was in my life before, and I shall hate many things I know of, more than ever."





CHAPTER VII.

GOING BACK.

ESSIE'S invitation to London made no small stir in the manse, and the question of her accepting it was discussed over and over again, before the final consent was given.

Mrs Muir was full of motherly anxieties lest her child should be so enraptured and led away with the unwonted splendours of the great city, that she would grow to despise her country home, and that it would seem dull and tame to her ever after.

Mr Muir, on the contrary, could not share her fears. He argued, "Jessie is no daughter of mine if she is led away by her first peep at show and glitter; no, no, trust her fully, Effie, and I'm very much mistaken if she does not return all the more gladly to her mother's nest. Don't clip her wings, or restrain her. Let her go, and God's blessing go with her."

Miss Macreen heard the news with a grim smile on her face. "Can you not stand alone yet, Gertrude? are you still afraid of tumbling? Well, take Jessie with you, by all means; she will maybe keep you in the right path. You know the saying, 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump,' and I am much mistaken if there is not a good proportion of leaven required in my niece, your mother's, worldly and careless household."

Gertrude winced, and was about to reply, when her aunt went on—

"Perhaps it is some providential instinct that makes you cling to that young girl so, Gertrude. Don't thrust it aside, child. The Lord works in various ways, and maybe He's drawing you to Him by her means."

"You always seem to think Jessie is the one to guide me, aunt, not me to guide her. You know, I am nearly a year older than she is."

"If I thought you would guide her to the vain, frivolous ways of the empty-headed people you meet with, Gertrude, I would sooner see her lying out in the churchyard yonder, with the summer sun shining on her grave. I would sooner see her die, than live to destruction, by renouncing God, and her early-taught lessons of

piety. No, you will not hurt Jessie, and I pray God you may profit by her example."

A gush of unbidden tears rose to Gertrude's eyes, and she tried to hide them by walking to the window, but her aunt called her back, and said hurriedly, as if struggling with some inward feeling—

"Don't kick against the pricks, Gertrude. If the Lord is calling you to better things, don't be ashamed to recognise His voice; when you grow weary of the ways of the gay world, my child, come back to me, and take Sophia's place in my heart and home."

Miss Macreen fairly trembled with emotion, and yet people called her cold and hard.

A few days after this, Jessie found herself in the stately drawing-room at Kensington, and she was conscious of glancing round her with some awe and curiosity.

Mrs Stanhope was reclining on a sofa near the window, and was languidly putting the two girls through a number of inquiries.

One might have fancied Miss Macreen was her dearest friend on earth, by the numerous questions she asked about her looks and ways.

"I have not seen her for twenty-four years,"

said she, turning to Jessie, "and I was a wayward girl then, about to marry one who was a stranger to my dear aunt, but I hope I may see her again some day. Are you quite well, Gertrude?"

"Yes, thank you, mamma," replied her daughter, as she moved a little from the penetrating eye that was so keenly watching her.

"I am glad of that, for I thought you looked pale. You must put on your best smiles, my dear, for some friends are coming to dinner, to welcome your return—Sir Jenning Holt among them."

"Then I had better see about my dress," replied Gertrude, rising; "Jessie will you come and help me?"

Mrs Stanhope was a faded likeness of her daughter Henrietta. She had been quite as handsome, and was still as fond of show, and alas! still more impatient and haughty than her daughter was.

A small dressing-room, off Gertrude's, had been, by her special request, fitted up for Jessie, and thither the two girls now went.

"Not even one evening alone," said Gertrude, throwing herself down on the chair, with a wearied air; "I thought at least to have this day to myself. Have you brought any evening dresses, Jessie?" "I have a new white muslin, and a blue muslin."

"The blue would not do; let me see the other;" and it was presently brought out and submitted to Gertrude's critical eyes.

"It is dreadfully old-fashioned in its cut, but I think we might manage to make it do; get out your needle, Jessie, and I will show you how to alter it; you shall wear white trimmings and a spray of white flowers from the green-house in your hair. I should hate to see you in anything artificial, or I would lend you one of my wreaths."

Jessie did not see the other two Miss Stanhope's till they joined the party at the dinnertable, and then she thought them very fine ladies indeed; not like her Gertrude; she would never have had courage to take a fancy to either of them.

Sir Jennings Holt was a short, stout-looking man, who sat next Gertrude, and seemed to delight in making her conspicuous by his attentions. He was quite fifty years of age, and Jessie concluded he was some oddity of an uncle, who was very glad to have his niece back with him again.

He was continually turning the conversation to her, making broad compliments and silly jokes, that contrasted strangely with Gertrude's stately manner and grave looks.

After dinner, when they were all assembled in the drawing-room, he continued his persecutions, behaving very much like an overgrown boy, in his boisterous hilarity.

Several other gentlemen were present, who seemed to treat Sir Jennings with a kind of good-natured toleration; they laughed at his jokes, while doubtless they thought him very ridiculous in their hearts. When Gertrude and Ethel were playing a duet together, Sir Jennings came over to Jessie, and calling her a 'bonnie blue-bell,' he began questioning her about Gertrude's visit to Forling. What she had done, where she had been, and who she had seen there.

The cross-examination was so pointed and so strange, that Jessie could not discover whether he was in jest or earnest, and was heartily glad when the duet was over, and she was released from his questioning.

When all the people were gone, and the house quiet again, Gertrude came into Jessie's little room, still in her evening attire.

She had evidently been crying bitterly, for her eyes were red and swollen.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL. 77

"Do you mind my putting out the gas, Jessie?" said she, "we can have a little talk by moonlight," and throwing up the window, she looked out on the gardens lying calm and shadowy in the silvery light.

"What do you think of Sir Jennings Holt?" asked she, presently.

Jessie, who still supposed him to be an uncle or some other relative, said she had not formed any opinion, but he seemed rather a strange sort of man.

"How would you like to spend all your life with him, Jessie?" asked Gertrude, suddenly, with much bitterness in her voice, and fresh tears in her eyes.

"I should not like it at all," replied Jessie, with surprise.

"Then what will you think when I tell you he is to be my husband two months hence."

"Are you really going to be married to him, Miss Stanhope?"

"I have been persuaded into it, Jessie, and have given my promise, and it's killing me now. Before I went to Forling I was miserable about it, and now I feel the thought intolerable."

"Then why do you go on with it" asked Jessie, naturally enough.

"Because he is wealthy, and is in a good position; because I shall have a title; because all my friends wish it, and urge me on; and because the eyes of all the world (I mean, all our little world) are upon me, for my engagement has been made public." She spoke with an intense satire, very painful to hear from one so young.

"Then you do not really love and respect him, Miss Stanhope?"

"Love has never been thought of in the matter. We girls were never brought up to follow the dictates of our hearts; he will be a good match, and they will be furious if I waver now; as for respect," continued she more slowly, "Sir Jennings is not the man to call forth respect; his youth has been wild and reckless, and now, on the death of his father, he has come into the family estates and honours; he is getting his house put in order, and wants me to take the head of his table, and sustain his title; no, I could never respect Sir Jennings."

"Then don't marry him," exclaimed Jessie, very much shocked; "it seems to me a fearful thing to get married in such a manner; it is heartless, and wicked, and not fair to yourself or Sir Jennings. Oh! I wish my mother could advise you." "I wish she could, Jessie; I felt half inclined to consult her when I was down in the country. Her kind, motherly ways made me feel as if I could trust to her."

"I think I know what she would say, Miss Stanhope. She would say, it is a dreadful thing for any one to enter the solemn state of marriage merely for wealth and position; she would say, act as your conscience dictates in this respect, and pray to God to be able to bear all the consequences that may follow; she would tell you, you were wrong ever to make such a promise lightly; but she would also say, it is better to draw back now, than to rush on to the misery such a match would be, both to you and Sir Jennings."

"It seems all very easy while you are talking, Jessie, but you have no idea of the wrath that would descend on my unfortunate head, if I should retract now."

"You will have strength given you to bear it, if you only seek for strength rightly. Go to Him who alone can give it, Miss Stanhope; you remember our hymn the other evening—

^{&#}x27;Henceforth thy going out and in, God keep for ever will.'

"You dear little enthusiast!" replied Gertrude, sitting down by Jessie and drawing her towards her fondly. "I wish I could be like your good, happy family, who look on every event of their lives, as under the special protection of Providence. Do you think God really cares whether I marry Sir Jennings or not?"

"I am sure He cares whether you commit such a sin as vowing to love a man you really dislike, or to honour a man you cannot respect. 'What shall it profit, if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul?' God cares for the sparrows, and feeds the ravens, and will He not care for one of His own created beings whom He gave His Son to die for?"

"Thank you, dear," said Gertrude, as she kissed Jessie; "you have given me something to think of, and ponder over; perhaps I may not mention this subject again while you are with me, but I am glad I have done so now. I shall think of your advice; and now, 'good night.' I don't wish to inaugurate your introduction to London life by keeping you up any longer to catch a cold, or get a headache," and Gertrude went off, to toss about half the night on her pillow sleeplessly, and to think of Jessie's words,

and wonder whether she should have courage to act on them.

She did seek for strength also, and prayed that the way might be made clear to her.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE WREATH OF LINNÆA'S.

E are not going to follow Jessie Muir step by step during her sojourn in London. While she enjoyed the sights,

and was at times amazed with their splendour and beauty, her sympathy for Gertrude kept her from really enjoying herself.

No other words passed between them on the subject; Sir Jennings came and went as usual, while Gertrude seemed ill and wretched.

One day they went to the afternoon service in Westminster Abbey, and Jessie sat like one in a dream. The architecture, the lofty roof, the many-coloured windows, gratified her sense of the beautiful.

When the loud-toned organ, and the full burst of voices and music struck on her astonished ear, she listened, scarcely daring to move, lest a single note should escape her. The memory of those sounds haunted her all that day. She fancied she heard them all through the rush and stir of the streets, in the mingled voices of the people, and in the hoarse murmur that ever surges on in the midst of the great city.

She went with a large party to the Royal Academy; and while the others, splendidly dressed, sauntered about, chatting with their numerous acquaintances, gossiping, laughing, and flirting, she rambled about alone, taking in her first lesson of what painting can do.

Jessie went from picture to picture in a kind of awe, gazing at them with intense interest, and reading their histories with rapt attention. She wondered how people could laugh and seem so indifferent, when there was so much really worth seeing on those enchanted walls.

But, perhaps, the most complete of all her treats was when she went with the Stanhopes to the Handel Festival, at the Crystal Palace, where many thousand voices joined in the Hallelujah chorus. A thrill of intense feeling came over her, and the quick tears ran down her cheeks. Gertrude saw her emotion, and pressed her hand affectionately as she stood beside her.

But with all these enjoyments, Jessie did not regret her visit was drawing to a close.

There was much in the home-life at Kensington that struck her as being peculiarly trying. Amid much wrangling among the sisters, one thing was very visible—fashion regulated every detail of their lives; the fondness for dress, the craving for excitement, the longing for costly display, and the dissatisfaction at their comparatively limited means, made the social gatherings oppressive, and the house ever seemed like a stall in vanity fair.

Pride and exclusiveness reigned there, and the little country girl listened day after day to rules and manners in society she had never even thought of in her circumscribed circle of acquaintances.

Well might Miss Macreen call it a "worldly and careless household."

Though the Stanhopes were not avowed infidels, and would have been indignant had the term been applied in their hearing, they lived the life of such; religion was never heard of, or thought of among them, without a sneer or a scoff.

Gertrude alone stood aloof, for her constant

wish now was, that she might be a better and truer woman. She was sick of the part she had hitherto taken in life, and had grown bewildered in her longings to escape.

She carefully shielded Jessie (as far as possible), from contact with all that might offend her ear, or disturb her ideas of right and wrong; but it was a relief when the visit was over, and Jessie was again safe in the parent nest at Forling.

But is not this the history of many a fashionable household, where mammon is worshipped, and where the world absorbs all the feelings of the heart?

Jessie returned to her home, more satisfied with it and its surroundings than ever. Her short flight into the great world had not given her any distaste for the less exciting scenes of Forling; on the contrary, she seemed to find more beauties than ever in its safe retreats.

She had been home little more than a month, when she received a note from Gertrude Stanhope, directed from Moorfield.

"What can have brought her there again?' said Jessie, as she handed the letter to her mother.

"You had better go and see, my dear; and if

we can be any comfort to the poor girl, I need hardly say we will do our utmost for her. I believe from my heart, Gertrude Stanhope will be an earnest, true-hearted woman yet; such strong impulses for good were never given in vain."

Jessie found Gertrude in the garden, waiting for her. She was seated in the summer-house, with a book on her lap, and surrounded with a very bower of jasmine, roses, and other bright summer flowers.

When she saw Jessie, she rose from her seat, and ran with open arms to meet her.

"I have come back again, Jessie, and come for good now, for I am going to live with Aunt Macreen."

"Oh! I am so glad," replied the minister's daughter. "We shall see each other often now, I hope; but how did it all happen?"

Gertrude drew Jessie into the summer-house, and in many words repeated the history. But the pith of the matter was, that in the end she had told her feelings and remorse to Sir Jennings, and entreated him to free her from a promise she repented of.

There had been some distracting scenes with

him; but at last she had prevailed, and the odious engagement was at an end.

For this, as Gertrude expected, much wrath was poured on "her unfortunate head," from her disappointed and enraged family.

"I was wretched," continued Gertrude, while the tears rose in her eyes at the very remembrance. "They were dreadfully angry with me, for a wealthy match, with a good-natured fool like Sir Jennings, was expected to have been the making of our family, and to have removed us from our struggling, genteel poverty, to affluence and plenty.

"At last I wrote to Aunt Macreen, and she opened her arms and heart at once. Only think, Jessie; she approves of what I have done, and has taken me now to fill Sophia's place in deed and in truth.

"You have no idea what a difference it makes, now she loves me. She is no longer the same woman. I wonder how I could ever have thought her cold and hard."

Long and earnest was their conversation; and when Gertrude in the cool of the evening drove with Jessie down to the manse, Mrs Muir pressed her to her heart, and called her "her second daughter."

Mrs Muir must have had a strange power of foreseeing things, for the two events she foretold for Gertrude Stanhope became, in due time, true. She did grow into an "earnest, true-hearted woman;" and every plan and purpose of her life was actuated by a deep feeling of religion—not in words only, but in deeds also.

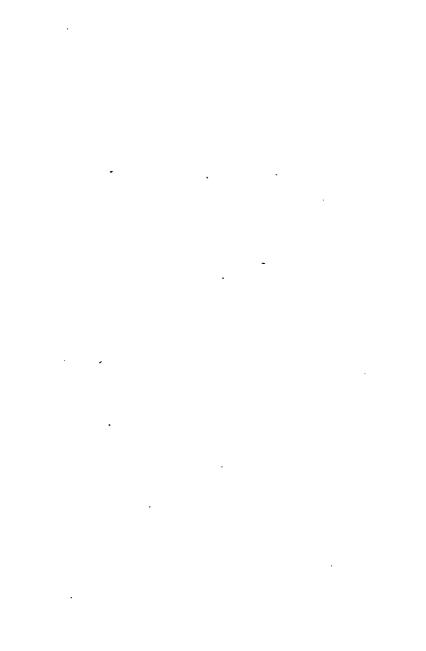
Miss Macreen continued to grow more feeble, for her days were near drawing to their close, and when she passed away, Gertrude found she was left the mistress of Moorfield, and her aunt's heiress.

This would have been a doubtful good in former days, while Gertrude was worldly and indifferent to religion, but now she felt the responsibility of her position, and a true regard for the welfare of the people who had come into her charge with the estate.

The other event Mrs Muir foretold, came true also, some years after, when Norman was a physician in practice, and getting well known in Glasgow for his skill.

He came to Forling one summer, and of course often met Gertrude.

She made a pic-nic for the manse family, and old Mr Muir promised to give himself a holiday and join them.





Gertrude and Norman somehow got lost in the wood.—The MINISTER'S DAUGHTER, page 89.

"Where shall we go?" asked she, when the ways and means of the excursion were being discussed.

"Should you like to see the old castle on the cliff again, Miss Stanhope?" asked Norman; "I mean the one near the wood where we found the Linnæas one day; have you forgotten our northern flowers? You told me you would remember them?

"I have kept my word then," replied she, turning away to hide a blush; "and if all the rest approve of that place, I should like to have another look at those flowers." So it was settled, and a charming day they had. Hector M'Lean now a minister of a church a few miles off, and Jessie's intended husband, went with them; the manse boys were there also, plaguing their father with their antiquarian researches, 'till he entered into the spirit of it, and was soon as deep in the study as any of them.'

Gertrude and Norman somehow got lost in the wood, and she came back a short time after, with a wreath of Linnæas in her hat, and a bright happy blush on her face.

"You must congratulate me," whispered she, to Mrs Muir, as she left Norman and seated he

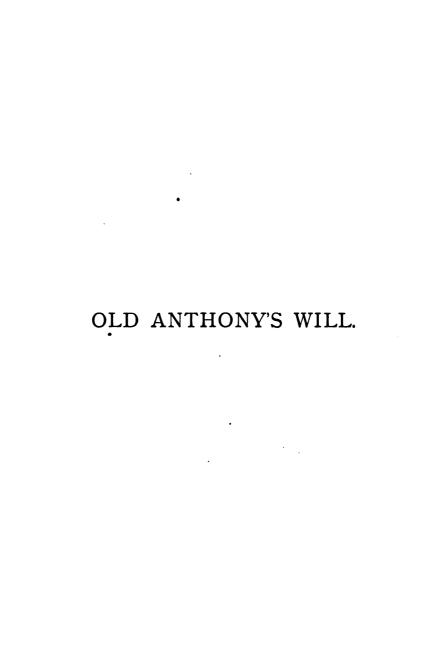
90 THE MINISTER'S DAUGHTER.

self by his mother, "you must congratulate me, for Norman has asked me to be his wife."

Mrs Muir drew the happy face towards her, while a tear of gladness sprang to her eyes.

"My second daughter," repeated she again, "how glad I am both for his sake and yours, for you are worthy of each other. God in His mercy keep and guide you both."





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OLD ANTHONY'S WILL

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW CHAIN PIER.



BRIGHT July day, an extensive sea view, dotted plentifully with snowy sails, and a look of excitement and animation everywhere,

The new chain pier had been for the first time opened to the public, and all the inhabitants of Rockview had turned out to do honour to the occasion. Sir Hugh Bannerman, the patron of his native place, had spared neither expense nor trouble in having the opening ceremony as imposing as possible. Among other amusements of the day, a "Yacht Regatta" was to take place,

and crowds from the neighbouring shores were rushing into boats, and crafts of every description to get the nearest possible view of the great race.

Far out from the shore, the pretty fleet of yachts was lying at anchor, waiting for the signal gun, and at a short distance from them, was a small steamer hired for the day, by Sir Hugh, and on board this vessel all his special friends were gathered.

On the deck were many groups of ladies, in their various coloured summer costumes, and numbers of gentlemen lounged about also, talking for the present of nothing but "crafts," and "tonnage," "smacks," "canvas," and various other terms of sailors lore.

It was wonderful how clever they all thought themselves in such matters; one might have fancied them all expert seamen, able to navigate a ship, weather a gale, or perform any other nautical act; but the fact was, they were most of them very "fair-weather" sailors indeed, and the first rude brush of a tempest, the first plunge amid a tossing sea, would have soon reduced them to helpless incapacity.

But there was no danger of such a catastrophe

at present, for the sky was sunny, and the sea rather too calm in the sunshine.

"What is the name of that outer yacht?" asked one of the gentlemen.

"The 'Emerald," replied Margaret Leslie, who was standing near. "How pretty she looks, with the green ribbon painted on her side; she must be quite new, I think?"

"So she is," replied Minnie Foster, who joined the group, "and she belongs to Walter Percival, who has just bought her."

"Oh! indeed," replied Miss Leslie; "then I hope we shall see him to-day, for my brother is soon going on a trip to Norway in the 'Emerald,' and I should very much like to be introduced to his special friend, Mr Percival, for he is continually sounding his praises, and thinks there is nobody like him. I hope he will come on board."

"I dare say he will," replied Minnie, "for he is very intimate with Sir Hugh Bannerman, and look! that is his cousin, Mabel Percival, standing over there."

"Mabel is not his cousin," rejoined another of the group; "she is only distantly related to him. They belong to two distinct branches of the family, that are for ever at variance; in fact, the 'wars of the roses' were nothing to their disputes. Mabel's father is Sir Stephen Percival of Westmere Park, a haughty, aristocratic, sort of man, while Walter is one of the Oakdene family, not nearly as ambitious a race."

"Then I suppose Mabel Percival is not on terms with her namesake."

"Oh! yes, she is," replied Minnie; "she is very much on terms 'indeed;' and she gave a knowing smile, as she glanced over at Mabel."

Meanwhile, the subject of these remarks, Mabel Percival, was standing a little apart from the other groups of people, and was looking over the side of the steamer at the little fleet just beside them.

There might, perhaps, have been many fairer faces among the young ladies on board than Mabel's was, but those who looked at her expressive countenance once, were sure to look again, and again. Her calm grey eyes, and her pleasant smile, were more attractive than the most showy beauty. It was a sweet sensitive face, tender and loving, and reflected truly a pure and noble nature.

There was a genuine simplicity about her, and

a gentle grace, at once refined and natural, and she was so true and sympathetic, that one felt sure of her. To win her friendship once was to win it for ever; but she was not easily won, and many of her acquaintances spoke of her as proud and reserved, but that was because they did not understand her.

Presently, the sudden boom of the signal gun was heard, and all eyes, and all attention was fixed on the yachts, as their white sails fluttered, and were spread out with almost a magical celerity to catch the passing breeze.

There was just enough wind to fill them out pleasantly, just enough ripple on the waters to form little dancing waves round the vessels as they started on their outward course.

The gentlemen wished for a stiffer breeze, and consoled themselves with the thought, that the yachts would get that, no doubt, when they sailed further out of the harbour, and into deeper seas.

Meanwhile, the little steamer, with her flags flying, and with much talking on board, set out to follow in the route of the yachts as nearly as possible.

Sir Hugh Bannerman, who was under the im-

pression that he looked every inch a sailor, walked to and fro the deck of the steamer. He wore the roughest of all rough jackets; he carried a huge spy-glass under his arm, and indulged in a variety of nautical phrases.

Not a more upright and honest-hearted man than he could be found in the county—loyal and earnest. Devoted, as he was, to his Queen and country, he thought the best work he could do for both, would be to raise his native place—the fishing village of Rockview—into a busy, bustling town of importance.

With this view, he spared neither his time, his energies, nor his well-filled purse.

Already a new, handsome church had been built in the room of the old tumble-down structure, that gave so many of the aged people severe colds from its extreme dampness, and its numerous draughts.

Already, two capital schools were flourishing in the place. A Mechanics' Institute sprang up, with fair frontage and ample proportions, and already allured many a working man from the beer-shop to a more profitable spending of his time.

A post office and a savings bank were also due

to Sir Hugh's enterprise, so that Rockview had begun to hold its head up, and was spoken of as a fast rising place.

And now the chain-pier was, for the first time, added to the list of improvements. In future the steamers would not need to pass Rockview because there was no place to land passengers. They might draw up at the end of the pier at all tides, and land as many strangers as choose to linger amid the lovely scenery and sunny slopes of the shore.

To celebrate this auspicious event, Sir Hugh had got up an aquatic entertainment, and many of his friends brought their yachts round to take part in the display, and a bright, pretty scene it was.

Sir Hugh came over to where Mabel was sitting, and paused for a minute.

"Ah! Mabel, we ought to have had your father here to-day; he would have enjoyed it very much."

"I am sure he would," replied Mabel, "had he been well enough to come; but he goes very little from home now."

"Many a pleasant cruise Sir Stephen and I have had together in our day; many a trip to

the Mediterranean and round the coasts in his old craft, the 'Sea Gull;' and a neat, taut yacht she was. But our voyages are over now, Mabel; we have both grown too old and crazy to bear rough seas and hard winds any more. We must sail close along shore in future, till we get to the true haven of rest; ay, isn't that the fact?"

Just then a bell was struck loudly by a sailor. "There, that's to say 'Luncheon is ready;' we must go down and get some 'grub,' as Jack calls it."

"Here, Captain Collis, take Miss Percival down to luncheon, while I go and look after some of the older ladies. Take care of yourself, my dear; you don't feel sea-sick, I hope?"

"Oh no! Uncle Hugh," replied Mabel. But still she looked with dismay at the long, low saloon, and the heaped-up table, round which the guests were already crowding.

"I don't think I can go in there, Captain Collis, it feels so close and warm."

"No, no! don't try it," whispered Minnie Foster, who was standing near them looking in also. "We shall get stifled in the cabin; let us take possession of this sofa near the door. Never

mind having no table; Captain Collis will bring us all we want. *I*, for one, could not taste anything but grapes; for, to tell the truth, I'm a wretched sailor, and feel dreadfully ill already."

Mabel gladly took the offered seat, and the Captain went off to fetch them some luncheon.

The banquet was well provided. All the delicacies of the season were there, interspersed with ripe, luscious fruit and fragrant flowers. But we are not going to attempt any description of the gastronomic mysteries. Suffice it to say, that when Sir Hugh Bannerman undertook anything, he was sure to do it well, and to spare no trouble.

"I can breathe a little now," said Minnie, looking round. "I had a seat at the end of the table first, and then I felt as if I was half way to Boulogne in a stiffish breeze. Oh! I was wretched, and so glad to escape out here again. Have you got my grapes, Captain Collis? You ought to find some more substantial fare for Miss Percival."

As soon as their repast was over, Minnie whispered to Mabel, "Now let us escape up the companion stairs; we shall have all the deck to ourselves for a little while."

And very pleasant the deck looked, shadowed over by the clean white awning.

The yachts were going on merrily. One round was already over, and the pretty "Emerald" was coming up "neck and neck," with two other vessels; the rest of the craft were all at various distances far behind.

It was an animated scene; and the two girls looked on for some time in silence.

"I hope the 'Emerald' will come in first," exclaimed Minnie. "Which are you for, Miss Percival? but I need not ask you," continued she, with a quick glance at Mabel, "for you have an emerald spray for a brooch, and a green ribbon in your hat; I need not inquire what colours you wear."

Mabel blushed rather consciously, but was spared the trouble of a reply, by the steamer's giving a lurch that sent Minnie nearly flying across the deck.

"Oh! dear, how the wind is rising," exclaimed she, when she had recovered herself; "and look! look! the yachts are hoisting more sails. What a sudden gust of wind!"

The people from the saloon now came crowding on the deck, for the breeze certainly was

rising very much, and speedily told on the increasing speed of the yachts.

All eyes were rivetted on the vessels, with their now well-filled canvas. The two rivals of the "Emerald" gradually began to fall behind, and the graceful little yacht soon took the lead, far before the rest. The excitement increased; and presently the boom of a gun pronounced the race was over, and the "Emerald" the winner.

The gentlemen all cheered her, and everybody crowded over to one side of the steamer, making her lurch in a considerable degree; and presently they all saw a boat pushing off from the fortunate yacht.

"Mr Percival is coming here," whispered Minnie; and soon every eye was watching the little boat that was dancing so merrily over the sparkling waves.

The steamer was speedily stopped, and soon Walter Percival—the hero of the day—stepped on the deck.

Everybody crowded round him, shaking hands, congratulating him, and making a tumult of applause and approbation.

Very handsome and elated he looked, as he received the homage showered upon him, and

replied, first to one, then to another. After the first burst of excitement was over, and the tumult had, in a measure subsided, and Walter had done all that was fit and proper in the way of returning thanks, his eye ran rapidly over the animated groups of people, evidently searching for some one; and at last he caught sight of Mabel Percival, who was standing quietly by the compass, a little apart from the other ladies.

He gradually but surely made his way towards her, walking slowly, as one and another stopped him to speak; but at last he found himself by her side, and was looking tenderly at her sweet face.

"I am so glad you have won, Walter," said she, holding out her hand.

"I felt certain I should come in first," whispered he. "My yacht would never disgrace the pretty name you have given her. How good of you to wear her colours still!"

They were standing near the stern of the steamer, looking down at the water as they talked thus, a short distance from the rest of the people, who seemed to comprehend in some mysterious way that they must not be disturbed, and so every one went his own way, and talked

his own talk, while Mabel and Walter spoke in a low, earnest tone to each other.

And yet these two were members of the branches of a family that were ever at variance, and had they taken up the family quarrel they would have been enemies instead of the attached friends they had somehow become.

Mabel was the only child of Sir Stephen Percival, who loved his daughter with a passionate love, while he appeared stern to the rest of the world.

It was said of him, that he would gather together and hold with a greedy hand all the wealth and power he could possibly grasp; but he had soft points in his character also, and the world gave him credit for being much worse than he really was.

Mabel, since her mother's death, had grown to be the darling of the old man's heart, and he scarcely liked her to be out of his sight. But some lurking delicacy had been discovered in her constitution—symptoms indeed of the very complaint her mother died of—that alarmed Sir Stephen, and made him call in the best advice.

"It might end in decline," the doctor said,

and ordered her at once to have change of air and scene.

So it happened that Mabel had been sent to Rockview to stay with her aunt, Lady Bannerman, and for the last three months she had been gaining renewed health and strength from the pure, bracing air of the place.

Walter Percival had come to Rockview about the same time also. He had taken lodgings there to superintend the fitting up of his new yacht, which he had bought of a gentleman living there.

At this very friend's house he had first met Mabel; the similarity of name had struck him, and he speedily found out that she belonged to that branch of the family, never mentioned at Oakdene in terms of affection.

Curiosity made him study her character at first; he did not think so sweet a face could hide an unpleasing disposition, so he studied her closely, till his curiosity had deepened into friendship, his friendship into a far warmer feeling; and now they had begun to be all in all to each other, totally forgetting the variance that, according to family example, they ought to have cherished.

These were the facts of the case at the time of their meeting on board the steamer, and Walter bent down over the side of the vessel, listening to her low voice, and turning every now and then to get a glimpse of her pure, fair face.

It was the brightest day Walter had ever known; he was sure of her affection now; all doubt was vanished for ever, so he looked round him at the bright scene, and at his pretty new yacht, and thought the world very fair indeed.

Youth, happiness, and love were all his, and his heart throbbed with joy. Other happy times came to him long after, but *this day* ever shone out the brightest of all; it was ever marked with a white stone in his memory.

"Shall I come to your aunt's early this evening?" asked he, as they drew near the pier on their return to land; "I must dine first with the other owners of these yachts, but I will get away from them as soon as possible. Shall you be glad to see me early?"

"I shan't expect you very early," replied she, brightly, "for you will find great attractions at your dinner party, no doubt."

"No attractions could keep me from you, Mabel; you know that nothing in this world can equal the happiness of being with you" He spoke earnestly, and Mabel bent still lower over the stern of the vessel, and looked at the rippling waters, which flashed and sparkled below.

They were in the harbour now, and shadows from the lofty cliffs fell darkly across the deck, but Mabel did not notice them, and then the steamer drew up to the flag-adorned chain-pier, and all the guests prepared to land.

Many of the present party were to meet at Sir Hugh Bannerman's that evening, so the parting adieus were soon over. All looked forward to a speedy re-union, and the streets of Rockview were made lively in an unwonted manner, by the cheerful voices, and echoing steps of the retreating groups of people.





CHAPTER II.

THE DISPUTED WILL.

ALTER Percival was, of course, the hero at the dinner-table that day, and speeches were made in his honour, and he made a capital speech in return.

But he was glad when it was all over; for he wanted to get to Rockview House early, as he had promised. He hurried to his lodgings to prepare, thinking all the time that Mabel would be looking out for him.

The twilight was fast fading away and giving place to deeper darkness when he prepared to go; a star or two was just sprinkling the sky when Walter stepped out of the door, and then he saw a horse standing by the gate and a man dismounting from it.

"Here's a telegram for Mr Walter Percival," said the man, holding out a paper.

Inwardly annoyed at any delay that could

keep him from Rockview House, Walter went back to his room, lighted a candle, and glanced over the words of the message; then he drew the light nearer and read them over again, and finally flung himself back on a chair, and sat looking like one in a painful dream.

A few words will explain the cause of his emotion, and we must endeavour to state the case clearly.

There was a fierce dispute between the two rival branches of the house of Percival, equal to the "War of the Roses," it had been said. The cause of this dispute was a family estate, no less a place than "Oakdene," Walter Percival's own beloved home. His boyhood had been spent there, and à thousand remembrances endeared every inch of the place to him. His father, Mr Richard Percival, had had possession of the estate for years, and by a system of judicious management, had improved it wonderfully.

But "Oakdene" had become a bone of contention. Mr Anthony Percival was cousin both to Sir Stephen and Mr Richard, and the estate originally belonged to him. It was true, Sir Stephen was one degree nearer by consanguinity than Mr Richard was, but then, poor Anthony

had lived with the latter all his life, and loved him as a brother. Once on a time, Anthony had been clever and intellectual above the average, but a shadow had come over his mind while quite a young man, that deepened and deepened, till, in his old age, he was weak in body, and still weaker in mind; harmless, affectionate indeed, he always continued to be, but still incapable of judging for himself.

He had made his will thirty years ago, when Mr Richard Percival was first married, and just when the first symptoms of the shadow began to threaten him. Guided perhaps by some presentiment of the coming darkening of his mental powers, he had drawn up a will then, in which he secured, as he thought, the fine estate of "Oakdene" to Mr Richard Percival, and to his family after him.

After this, he had continued to live with his cousin at Oakdene, and was as happy as a man in his state could possibly be; happier, indeed, than most people, for the cares of the world sat lightly on him. He seemed to have a boy's heart in a man's body, and spent an innocent, simple life; amusing himself in the garden and on the estate in various ways. He was passion-

ately fond of boating, and while Walter was still a lad, he used to row poor Anthony about the bay in his little boat, and teach him how to fish and bait his lines.

Anthony had died about a year ago, and Sir Stephen Percival had immediately disputed the will, and asserted Anthony was not responsible when he made it. He spent large sums of money in hunting up witnesses who could give testimony about the poor man's mind, as it had been thirty years ago—"had" or had not his capacity weakened then?

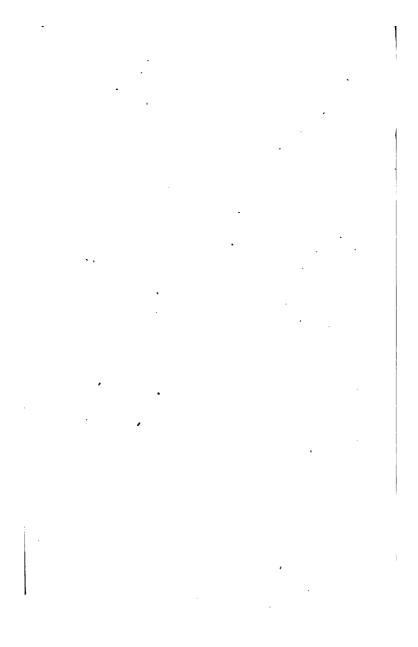
And so the peculiarities of bye-gone years had been dragged forth again. The struggles that had taken place in the timid mind, when clearness and dimness were seeking for ascendency, were talked over and descanted upon, often to the amusement of the listeners.

Little traits of kindness, and simple affectionateness of character, had been brought forward to prove his weakness; never had mental scrutiny been so keen; the dissecting knife of a physician could not have laid bare a poor trembling heart more effectually than this legal inquiry had done.

The younger members of the Oakdene family



While Walter was still a lad, he used to row poor Anthony about the bay in his little boat, and teach him how to fish and bait his lines.—OLD ANTHONY'S WILL, page 110.



had given this lawsuit but little consideration. They always talked of poor Anthony's will as being "right enough." They argued that "no man in his senses would give judgment against it; and that none but a grasping, avaricious old man, like Sir Stephen Percival, would think of disputing it, and doubting their father's right to the estate."

But alas! older heads had taken a different view of the subject. The whole love and affection of poor Anthony's heart had been counted as naught; and he who would have shared his last penny with his beloved Richard, was not allowed the power of carrying out his wishes towards him.

The will had been pronounced against. Mr Richard Percival had been declared to be in illegal possession of Oakdene, and, as a matter of course, Sir Stephen Percival, as nearest of kin, was to have the whole estate handed over to him, as the rightful heir. It was this bewildering decision that had reached Walter by telegram, and that made him ponder over the piece of paper like one turned to stone.

He was not a particularly covetous man, or over fond of money; on the contrary, his generous nature leaned rather to heedlessness of this world's goods. But the loss of Oakdene was terrible to think of, for it involved the ruin of his father's household, and the upset of all his former associations.

Oakdene was the pride of that part of the country; the handsome house, noble grounds, and well-managed estate, certainly had no equal for miles round. His father had done his utmost to improve it, and spared neither time nor money in bringing it to perfection. By its loss the whole family would be reduced to an actual state of poverty, compared to their present possessions and income.

And the man who had done this was Mabel's father. "His Mabel!" the girl who had become so inexpressibly dear to him, and who for the last three months had been continually in his thoughts.

The little town of Rockview had been a very place of bliss to these two young people, who had been constantly thrown in each other's way. They never noticed that the streets were narrow, and paved with hard, round stones, for Walter's strong arm had ever been ready to lead Mabel through them. They had never found fault

with the high stiles in their walking excursions, for Walter in his tender, courtly manner, had always been near to help the timid girl over the bars.

The pleasant evening gatherings at the houses of mutual friends, the boating exploits, had all been shared together, and a happy time it had been to both.

But now, Walter was rudely wakened up, and a terrible awaking it was to him.

His dream of love must be over for ever; the very remembrance of it must be crushed out.

What was his yacht, and his luxurious life to him now? Henceforth he must be a worker in the battle of life, and take an active part to earn his bread.

All his pleasant associations and surroundings must be set aside, and it would be worse than presumption to think any more of Mabel.

Walter Percival was by profession a barrister, and he had hitherto confessed himself to be a "briefless one." He had called himself so, with a careless smile, as he recollected how little it really mattered to him, who had

already so much money and influence at com-

But this idle life must be over; all must be altered. He must begin now to study the laws of his country, not as a mere pastime, to be taken up and laid down at the fancy of the moment. He must study in future for an absolute livelihood; and, even in his bitter grief, he felt thankful in his heart that he had his profession to fall back on.

Poor Walter remained in his room, thinking of all this, over and over again, till his candle had burnt down in the socket. It had roused him for a moment by its spluttering struggles, and had finally gone out, leaving him in utter darkness, and then he recollected Mabel was expecting him at Rockview House.

What time it was, or how long he had been sitting in his dreary reverie, he could not possibly remember; it might have been some hours, or it might have been half the night.

But he roused himself at last, and then was seized with an intense wish to see Mabel once more, just to say "good-bye," just to bear away with him a last look of her sweet face—just to have one more pressure of her hand—

and then the struggle would be over, and he should be better able to brave the future like a man.

So he rose up from his chair, went out into the dark night, and walked quickly down the streets, stumbling over the rough pavement as he went along.

Many people passed him, but he did not notice them. Had he done so, he would have seen they were some of the guests returning home from Sir Hugh Bannerman's house, and that it was already late and the company dispersing.

But he went in at the gates, past the wondering servants, stalked up the stairs like one in a maze, and stood at the drawing-room door.

Several people were still there, and many eyes were speedily fixed on him.

What could have happened to Walter Percival, they thought—he, the hero of the day, the owner of the fortunate "Emerald?"

Was this the handsome, triumphant man who had been so bright and happy in the morning?

He was haggard and pale, his hair in wild disorder, and he seemed scarcely to notice any one, as his eyes wandered restlessly round the room. At last he saw Mabel, sitting far back in the deep shadow of a window, and with a rapid step he crossed the room and went towards her.





CHAPTER III.

AT SIR HUGH'S.

ABEL had passed a weary evening, for she had looked out for Walter's early arrival, as he had promised. At first

she watched the visitors come in, and thought he must have been delayed at the dinner longer than he expected, and she made excuses for him.

But as the people gathered, and talking, laughing, and music went on round her, she began to grow puzzled, and wondered what had happened. Still she never doubted Walter; her thoughts of him were too confiding for that. She went over the events of the morning again, and remembered his softened voice, his earnest looks, and his whispered words. Whatever might have caused his absence, she was sure his love was hers, unchangeably so. It was a precious thought to her, for she had never met any living creature she could look up to so much, and so sur-

round with a halo of intense admiration and affection.

Seated by her aunt's side, she talked with the various people who gathered round the sofa, but still she watched every coming step, till her eye grew sad and weary.

Lady Bannerman was Sir Stephen Percival's only sister. She was a refined, amiable woman, but in dreadfully delicate health. Most of her time was spent on the sofa, so that all the active parts of the domestic arrangements were given up to her husband,

It had grown the custom in Rockview to speak of "Sir Hugh's invitations," and "Sir Hugh's plans," without direct reference to the lady of the house.

But though Lady Bannerman was not the active mover of what went on, she was ever the chief centre of everything, and in fact, in her calm way, regulated most of the goings on.

Sir Hugh attended to the out-door welfare of his native place. His head was full of coming improvements: gas was to be introduced, the streets were to be newly paved, and a railway terminus brought there. His inventive powers, his hands, and his purse, were never idle; and while he regulated all this, Lady Bannerman shone in her own little sphere.

Hardly a visitor at Rockview House but looked on her as their special friend. It was wonderful what sympathy was involved in her counsels, and what an influence she had in the society of the place. Her's was a true, heartfelt religion, that lay deep at the bottom of all her thoughts and actions; and people knew this, and respected her accordingly.

Scandal, detraction, envy, and all uncharitableness never ventured to exhibit their hideous traits to her. When she heard of a neighbour's fault or failing, she was ever ready to turn away the harsh judgment, and endeavour, if possible, to palliate the error. Hating and abhorring evil herself, she would far rather weep over the erring one, and pray for them, than cast the first stone.

And it was wonderful what an effect Lady Bannerman's example had on the society of Rockview. The petty gossip of small towns was hardly tolerated there—it was becoming quite a model place in that respect.

Oh! it would be well for our English manners if other highly-born matrons would follow her ways; others of a lower grade might catch the tone, and the time might come, when the shortcomings of the weak would not be treated with such indignant scorn, for many might be saved and led to better things by a kinder teaching and a brighter example.

Lady Bannerman liked to have her young niece sitting beside her, and looked with pleasure on her little dainty figure, and expressive face. Mabel had on a clear white dress, and a pretty set of emerald ornaments; the spray she had worn in the morning still sparkled on her bosom.

But the time went on, and people came and talked to them, and then lounged off to other parts of the rooms. Sir Hugh had laid aside his nautical costume and his nautical phrases, and went among his guests, trying in his goodnatured, homely manner to make every one enjoy themselves and feel at ease.

It was getting late when he came over to his wife's sofa and took a seat beside her. Dr Dunn was talking as he came up.

"We could not have had a finer day; just enough breeze to fill out the canvas, and then the wind increased and brought the yachts in splendidly at the last; I wish you could have seen it, Lady Bannerman.

"I did see it, and had a very capital view of the whole affair, for I had a sofa drawn over to one of the upper windows, and I lay there and watched it all; that little 'Emerald' is a most graceful bark, and sailed like a swan on the water."

"Yes, she's a capital craft; Mr Percival got her a great bargain from Mr Travers. I forget how much I heard he gave for her, but she's worth half as much again."

"By-the-bye, where can Walter be?" asked Sir Hugh. "He said he was coming here, so I wonder what has prevented him?"

"I dare say the dinner was very attractive," replied Dr Dunn, with a laugh; "of course Mr Percival would be the hero of the occasion, and would have to make no end of a speech, and all that sort of thing."

"But that is not the way Walter usually acts," rejoined Lady Bannerman, thoughtfully. "I never knew him break an engagement before. I don't think the mere applause of a dinner party can have made him forget us."

"Mabel, we have not had a single song from you to-night," exclaimed her uncle, turning to her; "were you waiting for Walter to join you in a duet? You see, the idle fellow has not appeared; but I don't think we ought to be cheated of our song."

"I will sing, if you wish, uncle," replied Mabel, rising in a nervous, hurried manner. He led her to the piano, and she began at once a sweet, melancholy air of Schubert's.

Every one listened attentively, and those who were already beginning to take their departure, paused as the words of the "adieu" rang through the room—

"Bientot J'irai, chere àme
Te joindre au sien de Dieu,
Ou ceux qu'amour enflame,
Ne disent plus adieu."

"Your niece has a pleasing voice, Lady Bannerman," said the old doctor, who had been listening attentively; "but she must be very careful, for she is far from strong, and is, I should say, of a highly sensitive, nervous kind of temperament."

"She was dreadfully delicate when she came here first, and we all feared she was following in her poor mother's steps, but she is much stronger and better now; the sea air has done her a great deal of good; don't you think so, Dr Dunn?" asked her aunt, anxiously, as she watched Mabel walking slowly across the room, and ensconcing herself in the deep shadow of a window, among the half-drawn white curtains.

Here Mabel lingered for some minutes watching the carriages of the departing guests drive away, and looking at the sea, which shone out brightly in the starlight.

Presently, she heard a quick step beside her, and turning round, she saw Walter Percival standing there.

Men have different ways of bearing trouble. Some who are experienced in the world's ways and have had many a bitter disappointment, have schooled themselves to hide their feelings, and they show no outward sign of the anguish that rages within.

Others have graduated in a still higher school, and have learned the discipline of affliction. They know the hand that deals the blow in love, and they bow meekly and humbly while they say, "Thy will be done."

But Walter could not yet be said to belong to either of these classes. This was his first trouble, and it had come in such a crushing, overwhelming manner, that he was half beside himself.

He was furious against Sir Stephen Percival, whom he accused of avarice and injustice; and he longed to defy him and tell him what he thought. He was ready to do battle for his father, who, he believed in his heart, had every right to the Oakdene estate. He was angry with the lawyers, whom he accused of partiality and subterfuge, and, above all, he was grieved at losing Mabel. They must be strangers to each other henceforth, and he was distracted at the thought of giving her up.

A terrible storm of conflicting feelings had swept through his heart during that dreary walk to Rockview, and the effects of it still showed in his face, as he stood thus suddenly beside Mabel.

She looked at him in surprise. Every trace of the morning's hope and joy had vanished from his features; there was nothing but a sad, eager look in his face, and a kind of strange despair.

"You are late," said she, timidly.

"Yes, and I ought not to have come now, only I wished so much to say 'good-bye.'

Mabel, you must try and forget about to-day, it has all ended differently to what I expected."

"Is anything wrong, Walter?"

"Yes, everything seems to have gone wrong altogether, but I shall never blame you, Mabel—never; and remember, whatever happens, I shall never think of you differently; no one shall ever take your place—you are the best and dearest to me."

"What is the matter? do tell me?" said she, with her eyes full of tears.

"I cannot, Mabel. I would not trust myself to do that; I might say things I should be sorry for. And now, 'good-bye,' said he, pressing her hand, and looking into her sad eyes for one brief minute, "say good-night to your aunt for me," and with a quick step he passed out of the side door of the room, and into the dark night again.

Mabel sat like one petrified—she was hurt and angry. Surely Walter might have been more explicit; he might have told her more. And then his "good-bye" sounded so much like a taking leave for ever; that would, indeed, be hard to bear. And her eyes drooped, and her face grew paler as she thought it all over.

People came up to her, and wished her "goodnight," and she shook hands with them mechanically, and felt thankful when they were all gone.

Then she went over to kiss her aunt, and hoped to slip up to her room without being noticed.

But Lady Bannerman noted her white face and trembling lip, and felt more concerned for her niece than she could well express.

Something certainly had happened, and this something was evidently connected with Walter Percival.

She was puzzled and grieved at the symptoms that were so evident, and she returned Mabel's kiss fondly, while she waited and wondered if any confidence was forthcoming. But Mabel frankly said, in a low voice, "Walter left his adieus with me for you, Aunt Alice, and he seemed very much as if he was going away for a long time."

"What can have called him off so suddenly?" said Lady Percival, musing; and she thought at once of the detestable law suit.

Could it be possible Sir Stephen had really succeeded? She had ever been averse to his

bringing it on, and had vainly done all in her power to prevent it.

But he had been utterly obstinate and unpersuadable in the matter. His love of power, and his determination to prove he was right, had made him push it on through all obstacles.

Mabel knew nothing whatever of the matter. Her father had made a point of keeping her quite in the dark with regard to business affairs.

Perhaps he had a suspicion of the part she would have taken, for her gentle nature always leaned to the side of mercy, and she shrunk from anything like injustice or oppression.

All this passed through Lady Bannerman's mind as Mabel stood beside her, and another thought rose there also:

"What if these distant relatives, that ought to have been enemies—what if they had become friends, and more than friends to each other?"

It would indeed be a painful complication of affairs, and her aunt felt more than uneasy as she drew her trembling niece towards her, and whispered kindly:

"You are very tired, Mabel. This day's excitement has been too much for you, my child!

You must be brave and courageous. I think— I know—you will." And then her niece made her escape to her room, just in time to hide the fit of unrestrained weeping that burst out, and for a while defied her control.





CHAPTER IV.

DEPARTURE OF THE "EMERALD."

HE short, warm summer night was soon over, and poor Mabel awoke from a troubled dream at daybreak, with the traces of tears still on her cheek.

Her first thought was a wondering at what made her feel so unhappy, and then the events of the last evening came rapidly into her memory.

She threw her dressing-gown over her shoulders, stepped over to her window, and saw a sight there that kept her fixed to the spot.

The "Emerald" was easily distinguished from the rest of the fleet of yachts that were now snugly riding at their own anchors in the harbour, and Mabel saw in an instant that great signs of activity were visible on board that' vessel.

The sails were already unfurled, and the active

crew of Walter's bark were evidently getting her under way.

The sea and sky were of a leaden colour. Heavy rain was falling. The breeze was raising numerous wave crests on the sea, and the wind showed every symptom of turning to a storm by and by.

Mabel saw all this at a glance, for the high situation of Rockview House commanded a view of the whole harbour, and she had spent much time at her window of late, gazing out at the pretty fleet of yachts that lay below.

All at once the "Emerald" showed symptoms of moving, and presently Mabel saw her canting away out of the harbour. The land breeze filled her snowy sails, and she rapidly disappeared round the hilly point, and vanished out of sight.

She strained her eyes, thinking she must be deceived, and that the little craft would surely appear again; but there was nothing more to be seen of her, and Mabel crept back to her bed again, shivering and weary.

By and by, she was recalled to her present duties by the loud booming of the breakfast gong, which Peter, the old coloured servant of Sir Hugh, delighted to sound through the hall every morning at its loudest pitch.

Several guests were still staying in the house, who had come to see the opening of the chain pier and the yacht race, and Mabel would fain have slipped into her place at the table, unnoticed by them all.

But this was not to be. Sir Hugh immediately spied her out, as she slipped quietly into the room, and made her take Lady Bannerman's seat.

"You must do the honours, Mabel, for your aunt is not well enough to join us."

So Mabel poured out the coffee, and tried to remember to do it properly, and not to let her thoughts wander, lest she should make some awkward mistake.

The conversation became animated. The events of yesterday were prolific in their kind. Then Sir Hugh soon had an attentive audience listening to him as he unfolded future plans.

"I want to get up a 'coffee-room' for the working men," he was saying, "as a kind of rival attraction to the public houses, where they will have good fires, newspapers, and gas during the winter evenings. Of course, my plans are

only in their infancy now, for we have not even a gasometer in the place yet, but I shall begin about that next, now the chain pier is open;" and then he glanced out at the said pier, and saw the spot where the "Emerald" had been anchored was empty, and that the gallant bark had vanished.

Hardly believing his eyes, he went to the window with the exclamation: "I declare Walter's craft is gone!"

Some of the others looked out also, and then the conversation turned on Walter.

"He took himself off very suddenly!" said Mr Edmunds, the owner of one of the other yachts. "The 'Emerald' sailed just after daylight."

"I wonder he never said anything to me about it," rejoined Sir Hugh, in amazement. "There were fully a dozen things he promised to help me with. I can't make it out at all."

"We shall miss him at croquet," said one of the young ladies.

"And I suppose we shall have no more boating," exclaimed her sister. "Mr Percival understood sailing so thoroughly, that one always felt safe on the water with him."

And so they went on with a lament for Walter, for he had grown very popular at Rockview.

"I suppose he's hardly got himself into difficulties," suggested Mr Edmunds, who was still rather sore at his own yacht losing the race.

"Nothing of the sort," replied Sir Hugh, decidedly. "Walter is a steady, sensible fellow. I have a very high opinion of him; and I know his father, Mr Richard Percival of Oakdene, is able to make his son a good allowance. No, he's got into no difficulties, though I confess to being very puzzled at his abrupt departure. Mabel, give me another cup of coffee, my dear. How pale and tired you look! You must get brighter roses on your cheeks before you return home, or your father won't think the air of Rockview is half as good as it really is."

At last the breakfast came to an end, and leaving her uncle the charge of entertaining the guests, Mabel whispered to him, that she was going up stairs to read to Aunt Alice.

"Do, my dear, and don't hurry down sooner than you wish, for you look as if you wanted rest this morning. We shall all get on very well here for an hour or two." Lady Bannerman was lying on the sofa in her bed-room, her pale face looking more refined and transparent than ever.

She had been greatly troubled about the scene last evening, and had taken herself to task for not being watchful enough. Sir Stephen's views with regard to the "Oakdene Percivals" were well known to her. He ever considered them of a different grade to his own aristocratic branch of the house.

It would indeed be unfortunate if Mabel had formed an attachment to this good-looking, gentlemanly Walter, who had taken all their hearts by storm with his pleasant ways and popular manners; so she determined to bring round the conversation to his name, and try to find out if her suspicions were true.

After the first greetings were over, Mabel took her book and seated herself near the window, from which she could see the hilly point round which Walter's bark had disappeared, and her eye wandered there, as if she half hoped to see it return once more—she could hardly yet realise that both it and its owner had vanished from her sight altogether.

"I hear the 'Emerald' is gone," said her

aunt, as Mabel turned over the leaves of her book.

"Yes, aunt, she left early this morning," and Mabel looked again out on the harbour.

"Did Walter tell you when he was coming back to Rockview?" asked her aunt, quietly.

"No; on the contrary, he spoke as if he was never going to return here again. He wished me 'good-bye,' as if for ever, and gave no explanation. Very strange, was it not? But, please, aunt, don't talk any more about it. I cannot understand it all, and it would be wrong to blame him without knowing. Shall I read to you now?" and her lip trembled as she bent over her book.

They were reading a Norwegian story, translated from the German, where a noble knight goes through marvellous dangers, but in the end overcomes them all, and rises triumphant. Mabel read on—

"The world and Satan are o'ercome, Before thee gleams eternal light; Warrior, thou hast won the strife; Save from darkest shades of night Him before whose aged eyes, All my terrors soon shall rise."

"The knight well knew that his father was

meant, and he urged on his noble steed "——Mabel paused, for a knock came to the bedroom door, and letters were handed in.

"You must put by 'Sintram' now, Mabel; for here is a letter from your father—a long one, I declare, and to me."

Lady Bannerman read it over quickly, while her face grew very grave indeed, and then she turned to her niece—

"Your father wishes you to return to Westmere Park at once."

"Is he ill, Aunt Alice?" exclaimed Mabel, rising up in alarm.

"No, my dear child, he is quite well; but he wishes you to go home without delay, so I must see about the preparations. I am sorry you cannot finish 'Sintram.' Had you read the next chapter, you would have seen how much he goes through for his aged, and erring father. Poor 'Sintram' wrestles with death, and with the fallen one for his father's sake, and he gains the victory, and brings peace to the old man's heart, who says to his son, 'Thou hast conquered; next to God, the praise be to thee.' He is rescued from the consequences of his past faulty life, and dies, saved and pardoned."

"It is a beautiful legend," said Mabel, thoughtfully.

"Yes; and we never know how much of our own life it typifies. Try and remember 'Sintram,' Mabel. If circumstances ever arise to try you, you must consider your duty to your father, and give up your wishes and inclinations for him. God give you strength, my dear child."

Mabel's eyes filled with tears, more at her aunt's manner, than at her words; for she did not understand *yet*, how the legend of "Sintram" could possibly apply to her case.

The whole house was speedily in confusion. No one had anticipated such an abrupt termination to Mabel's visit; and now there was packing, and farewells, and messages, and preparations of all kinds. Sir Hugh hurried every one, delayed them all with his contradictory orders, and was sure they would never catch the train; but at last all was ready, he handed Mabel and her servant into the carriage, and drove off with them, the six miles to the railway station.

When he returned home again, he found his wife lying back on her sofa, with her hands clasped over her eyes, idle and listless, for a wonder. Her work and books were scattered on the table before her, but she was giving no heed to either.

Sir Hugh came towards her, pressed his lips fondly on her clasped hands, and she started up from her reverie.

"Did you see Mabel off?"

"Yes; we were only just in time for the noon train. She is a good way on her journey now."

"Hugh, only think! Stephen told me in his letter this morning, that the lawsuit was decided in his favour. He has won 'Oakdene.'"

"Is it possible?"

"Yes; it was just settled, and he wanted Mabel home in a hurry, that she might hear about it from himself."

Sir Hugh took two or three turns up and down the room, looked out of the window at the chain-pier, and then stood beside the sofa with a puzzled air.

"I suppose this is a matter of congratulation. 'Oakdene' is a fine place; but what about Mr Richard Percival?"

"It will be simply ruin to him and his family."

"Then I can't say I envy your brother his triumph."

"Nor do I, Hugh. I used all my persuasion to try and make him relinquish the dispute; but he's dreadfully obstinate and determined in some things. He would go on with it, though there were opposite opinions among the most able men on the subject. However, the scale has turned in his favour now."

"Stephen must have been very rich even before this increase of fortune."

"Of course he was. Westmere is quite enough for him to look after, and there's no one but Mabel to succeed to it all. Poor darling Mabel! I fear there is trouble in store for her."

"How Alice; what do you mean?"

"I have sometimes fancied of late, that Walter and she are attached to each other, and such a thing in the present circumstances, would be very undesirable. Mind, these are only my suspicions."

"And I'm not sure they are unfounded," returned Sir Hugh, as he gave a rapid mental survey of all the happy scenes and pleasant talks the two young people had enjoyed together.

"It would be terribly complicated if such were the case, and yet," exclaimed he, warmly, "if I had a daughter of my own, I don't know one I would sooner give her too, than Walter. I consider him a thoroughly high-minded, noble young fellow, thoughtful, and clever also; upon my word, I'm sorry for him! and I'm very sorry for his worthy father."

"It is unfortunate for the Miss Percivals also," continued Lady Bannerman, musingly, "the two girls must be quite grown up now; this affair will injure the prospects of the whole family. I cannot congratulate Stephen, for I think he has been far too grasping; that love of power and that covetousness (for I must call it by the right name), has ever been his bane and besetting sin; no, I cannot congratulate him, for I am very grieved about it."

Thus husband and wife talked on, till the first dinner gong was sounded. Truly, the gain of "Oakdene" by Sir Stephen Percival, was not an unmixed good.





CHAPTER V.

WESTMERE PARK.

VERYBODY knew Miss Percival as she stepped out of the train at Westmere, her journey's end, for her father, Sir Stephen, was without any dispute, the great man of the place, and his reflected glory shone in a fair degree on his only daughter.

Passing quickly through a group of obsequious porters, and hangers-on, she found the carriage with its pair of sleek horses, and its still sleeker coachman waiting for her.

Driving rapidly through the pleasant lanes that skirted the village, the park was soon reached, and when its massive gates closed on her, Mabel tried to forget Walter Percival, and to think only on the coming meeting with her father.

A few minutes more, and she was in the old man's arms, and he was looking eagerly in her face, to see the wonderful improvement he had been expecting, from her long visit to the seaside.

"You don't look very much stronger, my darling! and there is far too much of the 'white lily' in your complexion still."

"But I feel very much stronger" persisted Mabel; "I can walk three times as far as I could when I left home, and I have a capital appetite. Aunt Alice has been so kind to me, and I have had such a happy time at Rockview."

Her father still looked doubtfully at her, and shook his head. "I thought to have seen you stouter, Mabel, and your cheeks more rosy. You must show me the great improvement in your appetite now, for dinner is ready, and by and by I have some important news to tell you."

"What news have you for me?" asked she, quickly, but her father only smiled, and said she must restrain her curiosity till a fitting time, and then he led her into dinner.

When the repast was over, they both returned to the drawing-room.

"I am so glad to be at home again," said Mabel, as she stood by the window looking out in the park. A calm, lovely scene met her view. The setting sun was lighting up the waters of the distant lake, and making them look like molten gold. All round, there were patches of magnificent trees, and glimpses of bright green sward, on which herds of deer might be seen, lazily cropping their evening repast.

Parterres of flowers, and noble conservatories, lay on either side of the sweeping lawn, and further off were wooded hills, and shaded valleys, but all, as far as the eye could reach, from the deer on the pastures, to the swans on the lake, all was the Percival property—all formed part of her fathers domain.

"I never see any place I admire as much as this; I don't think I shall ever wish to leave it again, dear papa," and she sighed wearily, as she spoke.

Sir Stephen was standing near her, scrutinising her face, from which he seemed hardly able to remove his eyes. Her still delicate looks pained him exceedingly, and dim visions of her following in her mother's steps, came back again, with a pang to his heart.

"You are tired, my darling!" said he, "let me wheel this low chair to the window, and you will be able to look out without fatigue, and I will place this scarf round your shoulders, for the evening air may be damp. You must be careful of yourself Mabel, for my sake, for I have no one in the world left for me to care for, but you. What should I ever do without you?" and his eyes grew red and moist.

"I stayed away too long," said Mabel, impetuously. "While I was enjoying myself, you were shut up here all alone, and I didn't think of that; but, papa, I will not leave you any more; you shall have me always with you in future."

Neither of them thought about the important news. The joy of meeting seemed to shut out other ideas, but at last Sir Stephen recollected, it, and then he said, "You have not asked me for my secret; are you not curious to hear it?"

"Oh, yes! do tell me. I hope it is something very pleasant indeed."

"Yes, Mabel; both good news and pleasant, for I have gained the day in a law case that has given me unutterable trouble. It is all settled now; another estate has come into my possession—'Oakdene' is ours now.

[&]quot;Oakdene?"

[&]quot;Yes, Mabel. It formerly belonged to Mr

Richard Percival, but I have proved the will under which he held it to be invalid, and it is mine now, as next-of-kin to poor Anthony Percival."

"When did you hear this, papa?" exclaimed Mabel, breathlessly.

"Only yesterday, and I wrote for you at once."

"That was what Walter meant, then, when he said he would not blame me. Oh, papa!" she thought this rather than spoke it, for the old man was still going on.

"It has cost me a great deal of money, Mabel, and everybody endeavoured to persuade me not to try; but I was determined to persevere, and the result shows I was right in my judgment. It will all be yours one day, my child. Now, is not my secret worth hearing? is it not a glad surprise?"

But, to her father's astonishment, Mabel was deadly pale, and her whole frame was trembling with excitement.

"Poor Walter," was all she said.

"Who is Walter?" asked Sir Stephen, quickly, and without waiting for a reply, he went on: "Oh, I recollect, he is Richard's son; and I

wonder at Alice making so much of him, as she seemed to do, by your letters; but I suppose she did it to please Hugh, who, I am sorry to say, is a little peculiar in his principles, and entertains rather a mixed circle of acquaintances. The 'Percivals of Oakdene' were never exactly in our set; we never visited with them."

Thus the proud old man went on, and he looked out of the window at his broad domains, now growing dim and shadowy in the twilight.

But a faint cry recalled him from his contemplation, and, turning round, he saw Mabel was falling, half fainting, from her chair.

"Oh! my poor darling," said he, rushing towards her, "I have been talking away, forgetting how tired you must be—too tired even to bear good news. I will ring for your maid now, and to-morrow we will say more about it"

"I believe I am very tired," said Mabel, trying to rouse herself; "but I hope a night's rest will do me good, and that I shall be more companionable to-morrow."

But no "good night's" rest came to poor

Mabel. Her mind was in a perfect whirl with conflicting thoughts and feelings. Everything was so terribly clear to her now. Walter's hopeless looks and despairing manner were all explained.

He was writhing under a blow, and that blow had been given by the hand of her father.

Of course he would soon grow to hate and despise her now; but then his passionate words seemed stamped in her memory: "No one shall ever take your place; you are the best and dearest to me."

Then the thought of what her aunt said to her about "Sintram" came before her:

"You must consider your duty to your father, and give up your wishes and inclinations for him."

It was altogether conflicting, and then, while hot tears were lying on her feverish cheeks, she remembered one of "Sintram's" most powerful weapons, the "fervent prayers" that strengthened him, even while struggling with "temptation and deadly fear;" and so, in her trembling, timid way, she called on God to teach her to know her duty, and ever to keep her in the right path. And she prayed for her father also,

148

till a kind of chastened peace came over her, and she fell into a quiet sleep, just as the rising sun was giving forth its first faint rays of light.





CHAPTER VI.

SIR STEPHEN'S NEW ESTATE.

HE next day, Mabel came down stairs looking pale and languid. She was silent and grave as she sat at the breakfast table, and her father sighed while he noticed how many strong symptoms of delicacy were still remaining.

"I am afraid you will find Westmere dull after the gay doings at Rockview."

"Oh, no, papa, it will be such a treat to be quiet; I shall have plenty of reading and driving, you know."

"I don't think too much poring over books is good for you; and besides, I want you to be a 'blithe mistress' of the ceremonies, for I mean to entertain more than I have done since your poor mother's death. You are old enough to take the lead now, Mabel, and I hope Westmere will resume its old character for hospi-

tality. We must invite a succession of guests here next month."

Sir Stephen had come to this determination while Mabel was away. He considered her life was too retired by far for a girl with her brilliant expectations. In future, she should have young people of her own age and tastes about her.

So numerous invitations were sent out, and Mabel had to welcome people to the house, that she did not care a straw about, and she had to join in amusements that were an utter weariness to her.

Seated in the great, luxurious carriage, with the sleek horses to draw her, and the solemn coachman and two liveried footmen to attend on her, she went, day after day, half over the country, returning formal visits. Wherever she went, she had to listen to well-expressed congratulations about Sir Stephen's good fortune in getting Oakdene.

Mabel grew weary of trying to pronounce her thanks in an unmoved tone of voice, and to keep her lip from trembling as she did so. Her cheek blanched, and her heart was heavy as she recollected at what a cost the success had been gained.





One morning early, Mabel ordered the little pony carriage, and, driving herself, she crossed over the heath.—Old Anthony's Will, page 151.

Her greatest happiness, in those days, was to visit among the poor of the parish, and talk to the suffering and afflicted in her kind, gentle manner. Her sweet face was always welcome among them, for she gave them true sympathy, and brought comfort and consolation with her.

She gave to their needs with a liberal hand, and felt gratified at being able to do so. It was one of the greatest trials to her unselfish nature, to think what a prodigality of wealth surrounded her, while others were poor and in need.

The Percivals, who had been driven from Oakdene, for instance—what untold struggles and suffering they must have had! what misery! what desolation!

Well, she could not help them. She could only pray for them. Once she had hinted the subject to her father, but had been met with such a determined opposition, and such a sternness, that she could not venture again.

Sir Stephen, kind and loving as he was to his daughter, could not be softened by her on one subject, and this was his feelings toward Richard Percival and his family.

One morning early, Mabel ordered the little pony carriage, and, driving herself, she crossed over the heath, to visit an old nurse of hers. It was a lovely August day. The hills were quivering in a grey haze, and nature seemed in her laziest, most luxuriant mood. A low, mysterious hum rose from the bees and insects that darted among the heather, and faint perfumes from numberless flowers and thyme-sprinkled grass, were wafted in the air as Mabel drove leisurely past.

She always enjoyed these visits to her nurse. It was a treat to throw off the trammels of ceremony, get rid of her usual train of attendants, and drive at her own pace where and how she liked.

Giving the reins to a man she knew, who came running up to her, touching his cap, she dismounted, and walked into the cottage. But no bright face of Lucy Williams came to welcome her.

Her two children were there, with a neighbour's girl to look after them.

۵

"Where is Mrs Williams?" asked Mabel, looking round.

"She ain't well," replied the girl, with a deep curtsey, "and she's up stairs."

"Ask her if she can see me, will you?" and

the girl soon came back to invite "her ladyship" up.

Poor Lucy was sitting alone, her eyes red and swollen with crying: she seemed almost beside herself with trouble.

"What is the matter?" asked Mabel, in surprise.

"I've had such dreadful news, Miss," replied she, sobbing.

"What is it?"

"All my savings are gone, Miss, that I laid by while I was at service at the park, a sum of thirty pounds altogether."

"How did that happen, Lucy?"

"Why, a cousin of my husband's got round him, and persuaded him to lend it, and now we've got news, that he's gone off to Australia, and left us in the lurch. Oh! it's very hard to lose money by a relation."

"It must be, indeed," replied Mabel, with a sigh.

"No one knows what the trial is, Miss, but those that has it. It seems to drive all the good feeling out of one; it has out of me, I know, for I've been thinking ill of all the world since I heard it, as if I could never trust any one again.

Me and my old man have had the first real quarrel we ever had in our lives, this morning, and he's gone out in a dreadful huff."

"Why did you quarrel?"

"Because he was so soft as to trust his cousin with the money. I worked hard for it, and thought it a store for sickness, or slack work, and I was proud of having money, but it's all gone now, and we must work our fingers to the bone to get as much again. Oh! it makes a body very wicked to lose money."

"You should not say that, Lucy; it is wrong to set your heart so much upon mere gold."

"Oh! I know, I know all that, and I know it's only filthy lucre, and that God says it has wings and flies away, and that it 'perishes in the using.' I've been thinking that all over, but I was never tried before, and I've been so wretched. I've hated my husband, and cursed his cousin, and doubted God."

"How dreadful!" exclaimed Mabel, while her eyes filled with tears; "can the loss of money change a person like that? I could not have believed it," and she stood silent and troubled, while she wondered whether the loss of Oakdene and its broad acres had produced any such effect

on its former owners; if so, it would be a thousand times more dreadful than the mere forfeit of the property. How had Richard Percival and his family borne their loss? Had they too grown wicked and doubting, and begun to curse and hate? Had Walter fallen in this manner? "No, I can answer for him," thought Mabel, replying to her own doubts, "he is brave, and good, and would never waver in his faith in God."

"Will you come over to the park early tomorrow morning, Lucy?" asked Mabel, meekly, as she prepared to depart.

"Yes, Miss, gladly; the change will do me good. I feel more resigned like, already, from having seen you."

Mabel's allowance for pocket-money and clothes was very handsome indeed. Her father did not spare her anything, so she was able to give large sums in charity; the only money she ever grudged, was that spent on herself, for self-denial, as far as she could manage it, was becoming habitual to her.

Lucy Williams arrived at Westmere Park, and was shown into Lucy's boudoir. She came in drooping and penitent, expecting perhaps some reproof for her impatience yesterday, but Mabel welcomed her kindly, and presently took a little packet out of her desk.

"If your money was restored to you again, should you have such hard thoughts of Providence, Lucy?"

"I hardly knew what I was saying yesterday, Miss, the loss made me chafe and rage so, but my old man and me have made it up again. We are good friends now, and we have agreed not to worry about it any more."

"I am glad of that; and now, here are thirty pounds in lieu of what your cousin took from you; will you promise me never to doubt the good Providence of God again?"

"Never, never, Miss, while I live!" exclaimed Lucy, clasping her hands, while tears of joy ran down her face, "may you have your reward Miss! May you have every happiness your generous heart wishes for in this world, and never-ending bliss in the world to come!"

"I shall hardly feel the loss of that money," said Mabel to herself when the woman was gone. "There was not even the shadow of a sacrifice in giving it. Why is so much wealth heaped on an unworthy creature like myself, while so many

who are good, and noble, are suffering from want?" and thinking as usual of the exiles from Oakdene, she sat down to employ herself with work.

Time passed on. The golden harvest was gathered in, and the October winds began to sway the old trees in the park. Mabel felt cold and shivery even in the sheltered walks, and kept as much as possible in the house.

She had grown more pale and spiritual looking than ever, and moved about the great rooms with a tired step, and a sad face, only brightening up when her father came in to have a chat with her.

Sir Stephen was now deeply immersed in the affairs of his new estate, and he found his cares had wonderfully increased with the possession.

His hands had been tolerably full of work before, with all the Westmere estates to be thought of, his tenants to care for, and all the numerous occupations of a large landowner.

But now there were *two* estates requiring his supervision, two stewards to consult and arrange with, two sets of complaints to listen to, from two places very widely apart.

Sir Stephen began to feel it trying, for he was one who would investigate business for himself. He could never content himself in leaving it to others, so he found his mind continually burdened with pressing concerns.

The worries and quarrels of his numerous hangers on and dependants gave him little peace. The calls on his attention were constant. This tenant was to have notice to quit, that man was to be advanced and rewarded. This extravagance was to be curtailed and altered, that plan was to be carried out more liberally.

What good had it all brought him?

Only more money to a purse that was already filled to overflowing. Only a larger surplus at his banker's.

Sir Stephen spent much of his time in the library now, with a table piled with papers before him. Even in the most minute details of business, he liked to master it all himself, and thus his mornings passed away in looking over accounts, in consulting and altering.

He saw less of Mabel than ever. A brief hour at breakfast, most of which time he employed in looking over the letters that gave him a glimpse of the coming work of the day.

The next meeting with his daughter would generally be at the dinner table.

Here there were always visitors to meet him, for Mabel had done her best to carry out her father's wishes, and make Westmere Park again hospitable.

Amid the lively conversation that circled round the table, he hardly noticed that Mabel had grown more silent than usual.

She looked as nicely dressed as ever, and sang her old songs to him when he asked her, and looked at him still with the same loving, affectionate eyes.

But mischief was going on within. She was drooping amidst all the loveliness that surrounded her, and, at last, the illness that had been threatening so long, came on and laid her prostrate.

It was a terrible time at Westmere Park then. Sir Stephen Percival seemed like a man out of his senses. The doctors came, watched anxiously, shook their heads, and gave him very little hope of saving his daughter.

Everything that wealth or skill could devise was done for her, but still she lingered for months on the border land, and it seemed as though she would never recover.

It was pitiful to see the old man at this time. His proud head grew bent, and he crept in and out of the sick chamber with a despairing look on his face.

What good was all his newly-acquired property to him now? It seemed probable, after all, there would be no one left to inherit it.

His time in the world could only be for a brief term longer, so what use had his triumph over poor Percival of Oakdene been?

What if he had been too anxious for the possession, and had pushed his rights beyond the limits of mercy?

Sir Stephen reviewed it all in his own mind. True, he was the next-of-kin to the poor, demented Anthony; but then, Richard Percival had devoted many years of his life in caring for him, and had surrounded Anthony with every comfort and happiness the harmless old man could possibly enjoy.

For gratitude's sake—for affection's sake—the will ought to have remained undisputed. It seemed the right thing that Oakdene should remain in the hands that had managed it so skilfully and so long.

Then, Sir Stephen began, for the first time,

to think on the responsibility he had brought on himself. One day he must give up the stewardship he had been so eager to take on his hands. Would he be ready to give a good account of it all?

He hated the responsibility now, and he petted and fumed about it like a wayward child who has snatched a toy from some other weaker little one, and who does not know how to use it, or what to do with it.

He used to sit in his daughter's bedroom for hours at a time, thinking all this over; and the rigid self-examination did him good.

Often and often, could he have done so without hurting his pride or demeaning himself, as he thought—often, he would have flung back Oakdene to its former owners; ay, or have given up Westmere Park also, if by so doing, his child might become strong and well again.

One day in particular, he sat there when Mabel was at her worst. He had placed himself in the deep recess of a window, from which he could see her fever-flushed face, and watch her tossings on the pillow.

The poor, little insensible countenance, and the restless eyes were teaching him a lesson he never

forgot. A voice seemed to sound in his ears, that the fashion of this world passeth away.

"Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun," said a great king in olden days, and Sir Stephen Percival remembered his words now, and was ready to endorse them.

In his case, most certainly, he had not been satisfied "with increase:" his desire had been granted to him, but no blessing had been added with it.

Had he his time to go over again, he would have left Richard in undisputed possession of the rich lowlands, and fertile farms of Oakdene; but regret was useless now; he could only do his best for the tenants that had come into his charge.

He had been neglecting his estates of late; he would do so no more; they should become as dear to him, as Rockview was to Sir Hugh Bannerman; he would build more schools, improve the cottages, and not raise the rents as he had before thought of doing. He would assert his highest duties as a landlord, plan numberless

philanthropic schemes, and make himself a blessing. But words still appeared to rise in his memory, and this time, they were, "physician, heal thyself."

This was the foundation of his wretchedness. His own heart was diseased and unsanctified, and till *that* was purified, how could he bring happiness to others?

He bent his head in his hands, and cried out from the depths of his soul, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

How long he sat thus, he could never remember; the two nurses crept noiselessly round the bed, glancing at the bowed figure in the window, but they did not dare disturb him or speak to him. They whispered in low tones to one another, as though there was already some one dead in the house.

The twilight died away, and the soft ray of a lamp fell on Mabel's face, as he lifted his head again. He saw her eyes were fixed on him—not with the restlessness of fever, but with a calm, loving look. The flush had left her brow, and her weary head was lying quietly on the pillow.

"It is the change of death!" exclaimed he, and rushed over to her.

"Were you watching me, papa?" said the voice he never expected to hear again, and he bent over her in a transport of joy.

But the nurses were at his side in an instant.

"You must come away, Sir Stephen, you must indeed! The crisis has come, and we cannot tell how it may end."

So they hurried him out of the room, forgetting their awe and deep respect in their anxiety for Mabel.

He waited outside, walking up and down, listening by times at the door, till at last the news came, that his daughter was really better.

"She has spoken quite rationally," said the nurse, Lucy Williams, with her eyes full of tears of joy; "she has taken some nourishment, and has fallen into a quiet sleep. Please God, she will be restored to you again, Sir Stephen."





CHAPTER VII.

AT OAKDENE.

HEN the spring came, with its longer days and brighter sunshine, the doctors said Mabel must have change of air

and scene.

"Wherever she goes, I shall accompany her," said Sir Stephen. "I shall not trust her out of my sight again."

So he began to think of a plan that might serve them both. He would utilise some of his new property by having the great house at Oakdene fitted up for a summer residence.

The scheme pleased him amazingly, and he wrote off at once to Lady Bannerman to be peak her services in the matter. All the furnishing was to be left to her taste, and when everything was completed, she and Sir Hugh were to go to Oakdene, to meet Mabel and himself.

All this was to be kept secret, till the time came when he should hear all was ready.

Very frail and shadowy Mabel looked, when she first came down to take her place in her father's house. Life and comparative health had come back to her, but her spirits had not fully returned.

She felt angry and disappointed with herself that she could not enjoy the rapture poets speak of at recovery from illness:

"The common earth, the air, the skies, To them are opening paradise."

But it was not so to her, and she felt thankful when she heard a change of scene was proposed for her.

It was a lovely morning in May. The sky was a full, deep blue, and the flower-beds at Westmere were all brilliant with their flush of colours. The grey boughs of the trees were all beginning to cast shadows with their new garb of young green leaves, and every hedge seemed harmonious with the melody of birds.

Mabel was walking in the grounds, leaning on her father's arm, in earnest conversation.

"I hope we shall be able to go next week;

the season is quite far enough advanced for you to take a journey."

"But where are we to go, papa? Remember you have not told me yet?"

"No, I have kept our destination a secret," replied he, brightly, "because I wanted to make it a pleasant surprise to you; but I will tell you all about it now. I have had the house at Oakdene fitted up, and your Aunt Alice and Uncle Hugh are to meet us there."

"At Oakdene! at Walter's old home! Oh! papa, won't that look like trampling on the fallen? Won't it hurt their feelings?" and Mabel withdrew her arm in her excitement.

Her father looked at her agitation with wonder. Somehow the surprises he gave her did not seem to be pleasant ones to her, and he replied in a tone that had a "soupçon" of annoyance and disappointment in it—

"You are far too sensitive, Mabel, and too scrupulous; perhaps from not being sufficiently used to the ways of the world. Oakdene is mine now, legally and rightly so. I can do what I please with my own property, and if I see fit to inhabit the house, it need hurt the feelings of no one. I have had the house furnished as an

occasional summer residence. Richard Percival is quite aware of my intentions, for both he and his family live somewhere in the neighbourhood. I have had it done for you, Mabel, that you might have plenty of sea air. You must not give way so much to feeling and sentiment, or you will never be able to battle with the world. You will always be a poor, little, crushed flower."

He spoke kindly, though his voice had still rather a vexed tone, and he looked round full in Mabel's face.

But a bright countenance met his gaze—loving eyes and a sweet smile.

"I shall be very glad and happy to go with you, papa; forgive me if I did not seem so at first."

She could not have explained the sudden glow of hope that had come over her, and she hardly dared to analyse her feelings. The "Percivals of Oakdene" were still living there. Surely—surely all would come straight in the end, and things would get righted by-and-by!

Sir Stephen grew eloquent now. He described the improvements that had been made in the place, and he said:

"Your Aunt Alice has had the house fitted up according to your taste, Mabel. She has chosen the very colours you prefer, and the style of furniture you would approve of. Oakdene is not an ancient house, like Westmere, so, of course, the fittings must be modern also; all in keeping, you know.

"How kind you are!" exclaimed Mabel. "I think everybody is good to me. I shall be ready to go whenever you please."

The preparations for departure now went on with spirit. Mabel threw herself into all the arrangements with great zeal. New life seemed to have returned to her, the colour came back to her cheeks, and the brightness to her eyes.

Her father was in raptures at the very evident change, and pushed forward the remaining plans that were to be completed; and at last the day came, when the carriages were at the door, and the household of Westmere Park prepared to migrate to Oakdene for the summer months.

Some hours journey by train, and then Mabel found herself driving through a beautiful country, with densely wooded hills, and green pleasant valleys.

A little in the distance lay a broad extent of

sea, looking as blue as the cloudless sky above it; and the fresh breeze came to her laden with briny odours, and reminding her of the bracing air of Rockview.

The house at Oakdene was a large structure, more picturesque than regular in its style of building; it seemed to rise out of a parterre of many coloured flowers, and a perfect forest of shrubbery.

The drawing-room windows were large, and opened out on a sloping lawn; a green trelliswork formed a balcony round them, where clymatis and jasmine intertwined with multitudes of rose trees.

The grounds were extensive and laid out prettily, but there was none of the grandeur and stately dignity of Westmere Park about the place.

Yet there was a romantic beauty about it, that would bear comparison even with the attractions of Mabel's own beautiful home.

Glorious glimpses of sea view met you here and there; in some parts of the grounds, you might sit under the shade of the trees, and look down over the cliff into the deep sea.

It was an ever-changing scene. In the stormy

days the wild sweep of the waters would dash against the rocks, and rise many feet in the air, almost deafening one with its roar, and you could hear the rough grating of the shingle on the beach, as it was drawn back by the under current of the waves; you could watch the wild sea birds darting here and there, and perching in almost impossible places.

But in calm weather, the tiny ripples were borne in from the blue ocean beyond, and one might look down on the placid scene and indulge in day dreams—sweet, waking dreams, soothed by the measured splash, and the musical tone of the glad waters.

Sir Hugh Bannerman, looking stout and brave as ever, stood on the lawn to welcome the new arrivals; he was waving his cap by way of greeting, and he almost lifted Mabel out of the carriage.

"Welcome to Oakdene! a thousand times welcome!" exclaimed he, rather noisily. "Why, Mabel, how well you are looking! I should never have suspected you had been such an invalid; you cheeks are rosy and your eyes bright. Come in, both of you; Alice has been breaking her heart about you for the last hour,

apartments. Just the place for merry, social gatherings, where people might lounge about the room, and step in and out of the low windows on to the lawn, and ramble from thence into the bright flower gardens beyond.

Certainly a more complete contrast to the heavy luxury of the spacious rooms at Westmere Park could scarcely be imagined; yet still it was perfect in its kind, and looked wonderfully sunny and cheerful.

Mabel spent the next day in a kind of reverie. She wandered over every room in the house, and made a pilgrimage all about the grounds, finding out, as if by instinct, the various views Walter had shown her of the place.

He had taken a beautiful set of sketches, over which he and Mabel had held pleasant discussions, she inquiring, he explaining; and so each spot, as she recognised it, was lingered over with intense interest.

In the afternoon Sir Hugh proposed an exploring walk, and she led him out under the cliffs to Rocky Cove. It was a clear, lovely day, blue sea and skies, and just a breath of wind to ripple the water.

Vou are a capital guide, Mabel; one would

think you had been here before. What erection is this now?"

"A boat-house, uncle, but the roof is all broken and out of order, I see; and look, some fisherman has brought his old, tarry boat, and placed it here tor shelter."

They sat down on a large stone to rest, and Mabel went over the history of this boat-house in her mind. Here the first craft Walter had ever been possessed of had been kept; he had helped to build this wonderful bark himself, but its make had been faulty, and the first time he had ventured out in her in rough weather, he had been upset, and picked up half-dead among the sea-weed.

It was here he had acquired the taste for rowing and sailing, that had culminated in his becoming at last the possessor of a yacht of his own—the graceful little "Emerald," that had won the race at the opening of Rockview chainpier.

Sir Hugh good-naturedly helped his niece over the stones, and found out the easiest path for her on their way back, thinking all the time she had grown very grave and thoughtful.

He stopped every now and then to point out

some pretty view, or a ship that was ploughing its way across the sea, with its snowy sails glittering in the sunshine; but he could not understand Mabel's train of thought, or comprehend why she lingered to take in every detail of the scene around her.

Sir Hugh did not mention Walter, though perhaps he also remembered him on this occasion; and Mabel was glad at his silence. There were many reasons why his name had better not be discussed just then.





CHAPTER VIII.

OAKDENE PEOPLE.

IR STEPHEN was full of philanthropic intentions towards his new tenants. They should not regret having him over them, for their interests should be seen to, and, first of all, he would get a personal knowledge of them. He would go from farm to farm, and from cottage to cottage, and make himself acquainted with all their ways and wants.

He would introduce the Westmere system of draining among them, and thus teach them how to improve the land in a wonderful manner. There was nothing like mingling science and farming, and he could throw many lights on the subject.

So the next day he prepared to make his first acquaintance with his tenants, and he set out, feeling like a benefactor and a political economist all in one.

"Good-bye, Alice," said he, bending down over the sofa to kiss his sister, "don't let Mabel ramble about too much. She is not very strong yet, so you must be careful of her." Then, turning to Mabel, who stood by, he prepared to cater for her amusement.

"I would recommend you to drive or ride today, for you had a long scramble on the rocks yesterday."

"Very well, papa, I'll keep in the grounds, except when I go out to drive."

She ran to the window to watch him go down the lawn, and stood there while he was in sight.

Tall, upright, and aristocratic, he looked every inch a gentleman, and Mabel felt proud of her father, now so strong and well again.

The morning passed pleasantly enough; she had a long drive with Sir Hugh through the shady lanes of Oakdene, then looking bright and gay with their clusters of many-coloured wild flowers, and she returned home just in time to help her aunt to entertain some callers.

Two or three sets of people came and went, and just as Mabel had settled herself to read to her aunt, the drawing-room door was thrown open again, and the butler announced "Mrs Cubitt." She was the wife of the doctor of the parish, and called herself one of the "oldest inhabitants of the place." A busy, fussy little woman, who knew everybody's history, and loved a little harmless gossip above all things. She prided herself on her candour, and made many a one flinch with her free expression of opinion.

Taking a low seat beside the sofa, she loosened her bonnet strings, and began to apologise for her husband, who had been called away that morning on a case of illness, and would not return "till late."

"But he will pay his respects to-morrow," added Mrs Cubitt. "I generally have to act pilot for him, and make my first visit to strangers alone. A doctor's time is so very uncertain."

"Is Oakdene healthy?" asked Lady Bannerman.

"Oh! very much so; the air is most balmy and salubrious, you might, perhaps, have noticed that. The Percivals were always strong and healthy here; this place agreed wonderfully well with them," and she glanced round the room. "How changed this room looks! Of course it's far more elegant and tasteful now; but some-

how, when one came to call on Mr Richard's household, one never noticed their surroundings, they formed such a centre of life, warmth, and cheerfulness among themselves, that one never thought of the room; they were a charming family. Did you know them?"

"I knew Mr Walter Percival," replied Lady Bannerman; "but he is the only member of the family I have ever met."

"Ah! yes, Walter, to be sure! What a noble fellow he is; he bore the change of circumstances like a brave man and a Christian, as he is! He might have been a little extravagant in his ideas at one time; he loved hunting, and, above all, yachting. Well, when the reverse came, he sold off his hunter, and his pretty yacht the little 'Emerald,' and paid his father's expenses with the proceeds."

"I have seen the 'Emerald,'" replied Lady Bannerman, "she won a race at Rockview last summer."

"To be sure! how stupid I am not to remember. Walter showed me the silver cup, and a very handsome one it was; he seemed to value it highly, and so indeed he might, for it is all that is left to remind him that he ever owned

anything so expensive as a yacht. He is in London now, and working hard at his profession; he does not spare himself, I hear; night and day he studies and works; I'm much mistaken if he does not make a figure in the world by and by. Whatever Walter undertakes, he's sure to succeed in."

"I am truly glad to hear such good accounts of him," rejoined Lady Bannerman, warmly. Walter was a great favourite of mine."

"And justly so; he is made of true metal; misfortune only caused him to shine out better—developed his inner nature, in fact—and made a man of him. He might have gone on dreaming all his life, with his hunting and amusements. But he's set all that aside now. He was very much liked here, Lady Bannerman."

"I suppose so."

"Yes; and he was always so good to poor old Mr Anthony Percival; rowing him about in his little boat, when he was quite a youth; teaching him gardening, and taking him out to shoot with him; the two were as fond of each other as father and son."

- "You knew poor Mr Anthony then?"
- "Oh! yes, Lady Bannerman, I was living at

Oakdene when they all came here first to live. All Mr Richard's children were born in this house, you know, and his wife died here. Anthony Percival was a good, kind old man as one could meet with. His strength of mind was lessened, but then he was harmless and affectionate to the end; if he could only have foreseen what was coming, it would have broken his heart."

"Where does Mr Richard Percival live now?" asked Lady Bannerman, quickly.

"At Little Oakdene, a farm he has hired. He has called it after this place, you see. He employs his time in farming now, and I hope makes it pay, for he understood the subject thoroughly, and increased the value of this estate wonderfully. Ah! it was like wrenching up an old tree by its roots to remove him from here. for he never doubted but that the will was a good one, knowing, as he did, Anthony's state of mind at the time, and his intentions toward him; but that's a subject I had better leave alone now. I hope you will like this place." continued she, turning suddenly to Mabel, who had been sitting silent and attentive in a distant window. "It is, of course, a disadvantage to succeed such popular people as your relatives were here, but you will soon live that down, and Oakdene people will be proud of having such an amiable mistress among them."

Here Mrs Cubitt found she had been gossiping a full hour, and tying her bonnet strings in a hurry, she departed as abruptly as she came, nearly stumbling against Sir Stephen at the door.

He came in, looking weary and harassed, with a bright spot on each cheek, and a deep frown on his brow. Evidently, his researches had not been of a soothing nature.

There was the compression of his lips, that his sister remembered, oh! so well, in old times, when anything disturbed or annoyed him. At last he burst out—

"These people of Oakdene seem a surly lot. I think, in the short time I have been among them, I have met with more disrespect, and had more insulting remarks made to me, than I ever had in my life before; had I known the rough set they were, I should have hesitated about coming here."

"You are only a stranger among them yet, Stephen," replied his sister with a sinking of the heart.

"That's no reason they should treat me with

disrespect. I have been told pretty plainly today, that I have no right here at all, that I am a usurper, and that Richard was the right man in the right place."

"He was very much beloved at Oakdene, I believe," said Lady Bannerman, bending down over her work.

"That may be," returned he, passionately; "but they had no right to burn my effigy the day the news came of my gaining the case; they had no right to hawk a hideous figure about the place with their hateful jeers, and they had no right to burn it, while they howled and danced round the bonfire like a set of mad Indians at their war-whoop; they told me of all this, with a kind of triumph. I would prosecute them for it, if I could."

"Mabel, you may get the flowers you promised to cut for me in the conservatory," said Lady Bannerman, turning suddenly to her niece, and noting the blanched cheeks and distended eyes with which she was listening.

"You should be careful how you speak before Mabel," rejoined her aunt; "she is so sensitive and feeling, that these things give her positive pain; she will grow to hate the place." "Mabel must not be so 'ultra-refined!'" exclaimed Sir Stephen, who was in a dreadful temper. "One would think I am come here as a robber, instead of the proper owner of the place; never was a man so persecuted for being in the right before; the law decided that question for me."

"I wish you had never tried the question," replied his sister gravely. "I always persuaded you to let things remain as they were; you were happier before, and quite rich enough."

"You are right enough there," and his voice was very bitter. "I was happier before, but I only did what ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have done. One would fancy I had taken unlawful possession of the place. I would sooner cut off my right arm, than do anything dishonest or dishonourable."

"I am sure of that," replied Lady Bannerman, "and I am grieved that things have taken their present turn. What is the use of all the riches and power in this world, without peace and happiness, and a blessing with them?" Her eyes filled with tears as she spoke.

"You are right, Alice; and, to tell you the truth, I am sorry I ever meddled with Oak-

dene. I wish Richard Percival was here instead of me," and he walked hurriedly out of the room.

Mabel came in soon after with her hand full of flowers—sweet perfumed, snowy, Stephanotis floribunda, feathery Deutzia, with its milk-white flowers, some pale, lemon-scented geranium, and some graceful, maiden-hair fern.

"Very pretty, and very delicate," said her aunt, looking at the blossoms. Mabel took her father's just-vacated seat, and watched her aunt, as she arranged the bouquet.

"Aunt Alice, I want to ask you one question. Do you think if people fix their minds on one thing, and exert all their energies to accomplish it, they are sure of succeeding?"

"That depends very much on the kind of thing they want."

"Oh! restitution, or an act of supposed justice for instance."

"You have left out one very important secret of success, Mabel. I think little of any endeavours, however laudable they may be, unless they are accompanied by earnest, trusting prayer to God."

"I know that," replied Mabel, gravely, "but

suppose the earnest prayer to be included, the prayer that ever rises, night and day."

"I should say, then, if the faith was strong, the hope of success might be great; but sometimes the answer does not come when we expect it. It may be a very long time before the prayer is granted, and it may come in a form one does not anticipate."

"Oh! I hope the answer to my prayer will not be very long delayed," said Mabel, clasping her hands, "or I do not think I shall be here to see it."

"What do you mean, child?" asked Lady Bannerman, laying down her flowers, and turning to her niece.

"I mean," replied she, with firm lip and earnest countenance, "I mean that I don't think I am getting much better or stronger, and I should like to see the Percivals back here before I go."

"You must not give way to nervousness;" and her aunt looked with anxious eyes on the poor, pale, little face, "would you rather Mr Richard had Oakdene than your father?"

"Of course I would, because he has the best right to it. The decision of the law in this case seems to me a mere matter of opinion. If anything happened to me, would the estate return to Mr Richard Percival's family again?"

"Yes," replied Lady Bannerman in a low voice. While her lip trembled with concealed anxiety she continued:

"But I would rather you did not take that view of the case—it seems to me very morbid. Leave it all in God's hands, Mabel, and if it is good for Richard to have Oakdene again, no doubt he will return to it in due time"

"I could even pray to die, so that he might have it," whispered Mabel earnestly. "It is trust-money, aunt; we have no right to use a penny of it."

"Do you still remember Walter?" asked her aunt, suddenly, with the view of changing the subject.

"Of course I do, aunt," and her face was lit up with a bright crimson, that for a time removed all appearance of delicacy. I shall never forget poor Walter, and he will never forget me, I am quite sure of that."

Lady Bannerman still watched her niece curiously. Her words had been uttered in down-

right earnestness; there was firm determination, too, in her tones.

"Some of her father's obstinacy about her," thought her aunt. "He also could never give up anything or person he had once set his heart on."

It was an unhappy business altogether. There was so much that was puzzling and vexatious in it. "Would it ever be set right again?" And long after Mabel had left the room, her aunt revolved it all over in her mind, and lay with closed eyes, softly hoping and praying that all might be well in the end. There was a clue, however, to the righting of things, and Mabel's confession had put the clue in her aunt's hands. She would watch and wait, and see how matters went on, ready to give her assistance if she saw the slightest prospect of doing any good.





CHAPTER IX.

THE OLD CHURCH.

ALF-A-MILE across the fields, separated Oakdene House from the church, and Mabel walked there on the first Sunday with her father and Sir Hugh.

As they drew near the door, a trepidation seized her, lest she should be brought face to face with the Percival family, for she had been told they drove in there to service every Sunday.

What she most dreaded really came about, for just as they reached the gate of the church-yard, a heavy, country-looking vehicle drove past them, and stopped suddenly. So Mabel was just in time to see dismount from it, a tall, stately man, older, indeed, and graver-looking than Walter; but still so like him that she could have recognised him as his father anywhere.

Two ladies also got down, handsome girls,

with the same strong family likeness, and the old man helped them out of the old ricketty machine of a chaise, with as much courtly grace and dignity as if he had been helping them to alight from the Westmere Park state carriage.

Mabel noticed the start with which Mr Richard Percival recognised her father; she saw his face grow stern, and his brow contract, as he gave a long sharp look, and she saw her father's eyes droop under his fixed gaze; a rapid flush passed over his face, and with compressed lips, he walked on quickly into the church.

Mabel somehow felt very sorry for her father, though he was the victorious man, and Mr Richard the conquered one; and she felt sorry, too, that even in the sacred edifice, a distinction in their state was made.

While Sir Stephen and his party were shown into the large, square-curtained pew belonging to Oakdene House, Mr Richard and his daughters were seated among the rest of the people, in the body of the church.

She thought that there, at least, no distinction should have been made, all men should meet as equals; for all are suppliants and sinners—all,

whether rich or poor, alike in need of Divine mercy and pardon.

Striving to banish the distracting thoughts that oppressed her, she sat near her father, and tried to give up her mind to the sermon Mr Jones so prosily delivered.

It was an unfortunate subject, for he told them of David, and the parable of the ewe lamb.

Every word seemed like a reproach to Mabel, and her head bowed lower and lower as he went on.

She understood it in this way,—they, the Percival's of Westmere Park, had not been contented with their rich possession there, but had eagerly grasped the poor man's lands, merely because they had the power of doing so.

Doubtless, the preacher had never even thought of such an application, for he was a studious, gentle-minded man, one not at all likely to make a pointed discourse at his new parishioners.

But Mabel took it all as meant in that way, and writhed beneath the infliction.

Not one among all the people gathered there had such a weight of humiliation at their heart; not a little Sunday scholar, in stuff dress and

BEWARE OF COVETOUSNESS. 193

white tippet, but felt happier than Mabel Percival.

Oh! how she loathed the thought of the money that had been the cause of so much evil; to her unselfish nature, the gaining it from another was detestable.

She sat in the corner of the pew beside her father, pale and trembling, while the old clergyman told them of the danger of covetousness, and the evil of caring too much for the things of this world.

Every word he said was true. Increase of wealth had brought no happiness to her, nor, if the truth must be told, to her father either.

Many in that humble church may have envied the rich baronet's daughter—the great heiress—who was clothed in soft silks, and waving plumes; but they knew nothing of the poor little trembling heart that was throbbing so uneasily within her.

Coming out of church, Sir Hugh was seized with a sudden wish to see poor Anthony's grave. He was bending down to read the inscription, while Mabel and her father stood beside him, and again the Percivals passed close to them, grave and silent.

When they were sitting at luncheon, Sir Stephen, for the first time, mentioned the subject.

"Alice, I saw Richard and his daughters going to church this morning."

"Did you speak to each other?"

"No," replied he, with a nervous laugh.
"Richard had a face like a thunder-cloud; I think he was surprised at seeing me here."

"And didn't much like it, I dare say," added Sir Hugh. "You will get used to each other by and by, and be better friends."

"I've no objection," returned Sir Stephen.
"I bear him no malice—there was no personal feeling in my opposing his claims."

"Poor Richard!" said Lady Bannerman, with a sigh. "Mabel, my dear, you are eating nothing."

"You must keep up your appetite," said her father, placing a slice of fowl on her plate. "You must eat, or I shall think this place is not doing you any good."

He was right in this; the place was not doing her the least good—far from it. Weary ideas were for ever brooding in her mind.

All the bright thoughts that had animated

her when she first came had faded away. She felt as if they were all usurpers, whose very presence must be an insult to the people they had displaced.

Her sensitive mind nursed these thoughts till they became of intense bitterness, and in the end her bodily health again gave way.

Lady Bannerman soon noticed the flushed cheek and weary step, the langour and listlessness, and she was puzzled what to do. At last, in very despair, she determined to speak to her brother.

Sir Hugh and Mabel had gone out in the grounds one evening, and Sir Stephen came in and seated himself beside her for a chat.

"Have you noticed how ill Mabel is looking?" asked she, with a sigh.

"I have, indeed, and am dreadfully disappointed; the change here is not improving her."

"This place is killing her," replied his sister, eagerly; "she is wretched about your having it at all; it preys on her mind to such a degree, that I fear the worst consequences."

"Why does Mabel trouble her head about it?" said he, impatiently; "it was partly for her

sake I urged my claims in the matter; it was only adding some more thousands to her future income. Had I been a childless man I should never have tried the case."

"I fear you will soon be a childless man," replied his sister; "and I speak now with solemn earnestness. Mabel is no silly girl; her feelings are deep and decided. She told me she would gladly die if the estate here would by that means return to its former owner; she calls the rents 'trust-money.' No, Stephen, she will never touch a penny of it should it ever come into her hands; of that I am convinced. I tell you this to show the indelible impression the whole affair has left on her mind; she is growing morbid about it, and I dread the consequences."

Tears had rushed into Lady Bannerman's eyes, and she stopped, overcome with emotion.

"Do you really think there is danger for Mabel?"

"I do, indeed; this worry, reacting continually on her frail health, is quite wearing her away. I fear she is fast following in her mother's steps."

"What would you have me do?" asked her brother, eagerly.

- "Would you sacrifice Oakdene?"
- "Of course I would—you know I would—to save my child."
 - "Then I will consult Walter Percival."
 - "What has Walter Percival to do with it?"
- "Has Mabel never told you how often she met him at Rockview, at our house, and at other places? They were constantly thrown together, moving as they were in the same set. I believed then a more than common attachment had sprung up between them, and I have had no reason since to alter my opinion. Mabel is not the sort of girl to change, when once her affections are brought out. Has she never spoken to you about Walter?"
- "I confess she has often *tried* to bring in his name, but I always turned the subject aside; I never dreamed of her really caring for *Richard* Percival's son; that would indeed be a Nemesis."
- "Say rather a Providence, Stephen, by which things may perhaps be made right again. You should not have crushed Mabel's confidence; had you encouraged it, I should not have to speak as I am doing now. You would have heard the whole story from her own lips; her

sweet, clinging, confiding nature would have made her long to open her mind to you. She would not then have been thrown back on herself, and have encouraged feelings that have made her miserable."

Sir Stephen heard all this, with his head bowed and his heart disturbed.

He could remember numberless instances in which he had grandly repelled Mabel's trust. He had set her words aside as things of little importance.

With his new possessions, a barrier had arisen between him and his daughter, that had ever been growing wider and deeper.

Once he had been tender and indulgent, but now, he confessed to himself, he had grown stern and intolerant—repressing all that might lower his pride, or add to the doubts already rampant in his mind.

He could remember numberless instances of this, but Mabel had never complained; she had always been the same loving, dutiful, and affectionate daughter.

His "mammon-worship" was hiding his true feelings, and keeping down his better resolves. He would face the thought now, and take warning. The words rang in his mind, as they had done on a former occasion, that the fashion of this world passeth away; and how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven.

He roused himself at last to attend to what Lady Bannerman was saying, and they had a long, earnest conversation.

He could not resist the wise pleading of his sister's lips; and while she blamed, she administered consolation, such as a true Christian woman could offer.

"I see it all now," said he, while he covered his eyes with his hands; "self and covetousness have been the foundation of my dreams of justice; if I can make amends now, I will."

"Then you will sanction whatever I see best to do for Mabel's good; will you trust all to me?"

"I will, I will, Alice; and may God bless your endeavours! Oh! may He spare my child to me. I have only at best a few more years to live, and it is the dearest wish of my heart to see Mabel happy before I die."

Sir Stephen spoke with an emotion that made

his very frame tremble, and he hurried out of the room without another word. He shut himself up in the library, and did not join the family again till evening was far advanced.





CHAPTER X.

LADY BANNERMAN'S PLANS.

ABEL'S aunt had a difficult task before her. Often as she had smoothed out complications, and arranged hard mat-

ters for the good of her fellow-creatures, she was fain to confess she had never undertaken so trying a task as restoring peace to the house of Percival.

But we are not going to detail her plans, or give one tithe of the schemes that floated through her mind, as she puzzled over the subject night and day.

There was much to overcome. Richard Percival was, of course, bitter in his mind against his rival. He felt himself injured, and termed Sir Stephen a "grasping ambitious man."

Walter, of course, as a good son and brother,

must naturally take his father's side of the question; and it is certain no act of humiliation on Sir Stephen's part could ever make atonement and obliterate the stormy feelings he had roused.

In vain might he hold out the olive branch, and, metaphorically, offer to bury the war-hatchet. His proposals would have been indignantly rejected by the Percivals of Little Oakdene.

Lady Bannerman knew all this when she came to the rescue, and did not include these offers in her frank suggestions. But we are not to unfold her plans; we must only relate the result of them.

Walter well knew Lady Bannerman's character. He revered and respected her as much as he could any woman. Knowing her noble soul, and her utter abhorrence of any petty feelings, he listened to her as he would not have done to any one else—not even to Mabel.

Not that he had forgotten Mabel—he could never do that. He remembered her still with an intensity that made him shrink from forming any other ties.

But there was no hope mingled in his love for

her. The past was a feverish dream, only to be thought over in secret.

He was perfectly aware his affection for Mabel would meet with no sympathy either from his friends or her own, so he went on his way taking the work-a-day world as he found it, ready to adopt the most unflinching rules of self discipline for himself, and musing over his buried love, as the sole poetry of a very hard-working, prosiac existence.

He was not unhappy. No one ever is in the strict path of duty; and a peace not of man but of God was with him, for he had learned where to put his trust.

Lady Bannerman went about her work in a Christian, hopeful spirit; and whether by some great instinct, or by some deep reasoning, she at last succeeded in convincing Walter's mind, and at last her reward came.

It appeared in the shape of a long letter, written by him, in which he confessed she had overcome his scruples, and he said he would come to Oakdene.

He would be there the next day, and remain to dinner, returning in the evening to his friends at Little Oakdene. Mabel had been walking among the flowerbeds in her slow, quiet way, looking grave and sad, where everything about her was bright and sunny.

Always tired, she stepped wearily in at the low window of the drawing-room, and found her aunt busily reading Walter's letter.

"You seem to have some good news, Aunt Alice," said she, noting her aunt's bright face; "you look quite happy this morning."

"I do feel very happy,"—and, then, drawing her niece towards her, she began talking of a true confidence in the designs of Providence.

"We are often tempted to doubt," continued she, "but God is better to us than we are to ourselves. He leads us on safely to the end, if we will only trust in Him. It is because we grow rebellious, and will not wait in a proper spirit, that we are blind, and unhappy, and wretched."

"Ah! Aunt Alice, I wish I was like you. I wish I could read life's meanings as you do."

Lady Bannerman looked down fondly into the little face that was turned to her so anxiously, and she smoothed her hair caressingly, as she whispered"O, fear not, in a world like this,

And thou shalt know, ere long—

Know how sublime a thing it is,

To suffer, and be strong."

"What are you going to do this morning, Mabel?"

"Read to you, aunt, if you like."

"No, dear; get your work, and you can help me with my new lace pattern. I feel more inclined for talking than reading just now."

And then, by degrees, she began to speak about a seldom-mentioned subject—" The Percivals of Little Oakdene."

After a while, she led the conversation round to Walter.

"I don't think this reverse of fortune has injured him in the least, Mabel; a true man is never the worse for being thrown on himself for a while. He gains thereby an insight into his own nature; he feels his power, his good qualities shine forth, and he becomes a better and more earnest character. When you see Walter again, you will not find him the worse for his late severe discipline."

"When I see him again! Oh! aunt, that is

likely to be *never*; or, if by chance I did meet him, perhaps he would pass me with the same look Mr Richard gave papa the other day. But I don't think he would do that," continued she, musingly, "though no one could blame him if he did."

"I don't think he would, either, and I trust there are happy days in store for you both. He is coming here to-morrow, Mabel; shall you be glad to see him?"

"Glad!"—one look in the bright face was an answer to that question; there was a gleam of frightened joy, and then of anxious inquiry.

"Is he coming to be friends with papa, also? Will this affair about Oakdene be settled? Will the horrid family dispute be over?"

"And all end well, like a pleasant book?" added her aunt laughing. "I can't answer all these questions, time will determine them, I suppose; a great deal will rest with you, and, oh! my child, take a lesson from the past, and be brave and trusting in future, however dark the clouds may be."

In the afternoon, Mabel, her father, and Sir Hugh, went out for a ramble on the high cliffs, and certainly they all enjoyed it better than they had done any walk, since they had been at Oakdene.

A shadow seemed to have vanished from each of their hearts. Mabel went on with a softer glow on her cheek, and with greater elasticity in her step, than she had had for months.

She wandered here and there, gathering seapinks, and stopped to join them every now and then, as they pointed out some favourite view. Sir Hugh spoke of this change to her father, and he quietly watched her, and speculated on the unexpected turn things were taking.

His schemes were toppling down, but he felt glad of it, for with their downfall peace was returning to him, and hope and love to his daughter.

The next day, Mabel dressed herself for dinner, and came and seated herself on the low chair beside Lady Bannerman's sofa.

Her aunt looked approvingly at her calm, serious face. She was dressed in white, and for the first time since last summer, had put on her pretty set of "emeralds."

Drawing very close to Lady Bannerman, and holding her hand as if for support; and with the tremulousness of suppressed agitation, she waited there, till Walter's step was heard on the stairs.

He came over to them as they thus watched for him, and shaking hands with both, he strove hard to master the emotion that made his hand tremble, and his voice unsteady.

Then he drew a chair over beside them, and strove to talk of indifferent things, while Mabel observed how grave and pale he had grown, and how much like his father.

Lady Bannerman soon after went out of the room, leaning on her maid's arm, to dress for dinner, and then Walter drew near Mabel, took both her hands, and began telling of his present hope and past despair.

It would be unfair to disclose all the earnest confidences of that meeting, for they had much to say to each other, and the interview was long.

They were still talking, when Sir Hugh came in leading back his wife, and Sir Stephen, ready dressed for the late dinner, came in with them.

It would have been an awkward meeting for Sir Stephen Percival, had Walter been any other than the considerate, high-minded man he was. His genuine goodness soon asserted itself; he speedily won his way to the baronet's heart; and before half the evening was over, a kindly feeling had sprung up between them.

After dinner, there was a long interview between them in the library; family matters were freely discussed and at last, satisfactorily arranged; and when they emerged from the room, both were satisfied. Sir Stephen had acknowledged that Walter was worthy to become his son, and had consented to receive him as Mabel's future husband.

The rest of the evening was a festive occasion at Oakdene; never was there a happier family gathering.

"We must have your father and sisters here to-morrow, Walter," said Sir Stephen, graciously; "our circle will not be complete till then. We must not do things by halves; Richard Percival must share our happiness with us."

By this, it will be seen that Sir Stephen was ready to fulfil all his promises to his sister, and to hold out an universal "olive branch."

He was positively beaming with good feeling, a weight had gone off from his heart, and he felt happier than he had been for many a day.

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Mabel sang her father's favourite songs, and Walter found he knew most of them, for they had often sung them together at Rockview; so he took a part with her, and turned over the leaves of her music.

Then, as the evening advanced, Sir Hugh engaged his wife and Sir Stephen in an animated discussion, while the reunited lovers followed their own free will, and talked together beside the low window.

Things were coming to a happy ending after all. The hopeful future, with its coming joys, would not be the worse for the dreary past that was over now.

Had there been no interruption to their smooth and easy life, Walter might have become worldly and luxurious in his ideas; and Mabel perhaps, would have developed into a passive, pliant creature, too weak to endure, and too timid to be brave. But it had been ordered otherwise; both had had their lesson, and not in vain.

A higher tone of character had been awakened in them; romance had sobered down, and a deeper feeling had taken its place, that would influence their future lives. Mr Richard Percival accepted the right hand of friendship held out to him by Sir Stephen Whatever his former feelings might have been, he would not cherish revenge, and he made concessions to the family of his son's intended wife, for his son's sake.

So they all came to Oakdene the next day, driving in the heavy, country chaise; and Mabel, shy and frightened at first, soon began to feel at ease with them, and ended by liking them very much.

The girls were frank and generous, fond of music and botany; in fact they had so many tastes in common with Mabel, that a speedy intimacy sprang up, that promised to be a source of future pleasure to them all.

Before the autumn fruits had taken the place of the summer flowers, all the people of Oakdene were talking.

A wonderful piece of news had got among them. Mr Richard Percival was coming back to his old place again; their favourite landlord was to be with them once more.

There were many discussions among the people on the subject; some said a second law affair had reversed the decision of the former one, and that poor Anthony's will was proved to be a good one after all.

Others of the Oakdene people affirmed there was no second lawsuit at all, but that "amicable arrangements had taken place between Sir Stephen and Mr Richard Percival."

And soon after this a second report was talked of, not one whit less wonderful in its import:

They said—"Walter Percival was soon to marry Sir Stephen's only daughter, and to go to Westmere Park as his future abode."

They said—"Sir Stephen wanted him to manage the affairs of the estate, for he had decided to give up the anxiety of business, and to spend the rest of his days in peace, and in the society of his daughter and her husband."

His old ambition was over, they said, and he wished now to wean himself from the cares of too anxious life, and to walk humbly with his God.

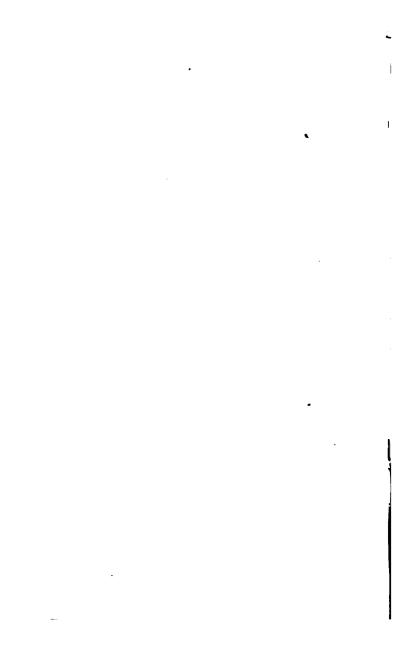
These reports came true in due time, and were celebrated by blazing bonfires on every hill.

The old church bells sent out their merriest peals, and stirred every heart at Oakdene with joy. The tenants on the estate were regaled • with substantial feasts, and all agreed that things had taken the right turn at last.

A difficult question had been settled, and the rival branches of the house of Percival were rivals no longer. Peace had returned to them, and there was every prospect of true and abiding happiness.



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CONTENTS.

| | | | | | | PAGE |
|---|----------------|---------|--------|-------|-------|---------|
| Ниси Мил | LER'S WORKS, . | _ | _ | | | 3-5 |
| ASCOTT R. | • | • | • | • | | 6-7 |
| | | | • | . ' | • | |
| | ANDARD LIBRA | | • | • | • | . 8–9 |
| ,, Po | PULAR EDITION | OF THE | POETS, | , , | | . 10–11 |
| ,, Q | UARTO GIFT BOO | Ks, . | • | | | . 12–13 |
| ,, S1 | elect Library, | | • | | | . 14 |
| ,, F 1 | VE SHILLING G | FT Boo | K8, . | | | . 15 |
| ,, U | NIVERSAL GIFT | Books, | | | | 16-17 |
| ,, H | ALF-CROWN REV | WARDS, | | | | . 18 |
| ,, T | wo Shilling | ,, | | | | . 19 |
| ,, E i | GHTEENPENNY | ,, | | | , | . 20 |
| ,, St | INDAY SCHOOL | ,, | • | | • | . 21 |
| ,, 0 : | ne Shilling Ju | VENILES | . وا | | | . 22–23 |
| ,, N | INEPENNY | ,, | • | | | . 24 |
| ,, Sı | XPENNY | ,, | | | , , | . 25 |
| 'HEAVEN OUR HOME,' AND OTHER WORKS BY SAME AUTHOR, 26 | | | | | | |
| Мимо's Ре | OPULAR RELIGIO | us Gift | Books | , | . 1/0 | 3 27 |
| ,, Po | OPULAR RELIGIO | us Wor | .K8, . | | . 2/0 | 8 28 |
| ,, H | ANDY BOOKS OF | Useful | L Know | LEDGE | , | . 28 |
| ,, R | OYAL ILLUMINA: | red Leg | ENDS, | | • | . 29 |
| MISCELLAN | eous Works, | | | | • | . 30-32 |
| Міммо' в Ре | OCKET TREASUR | ES, . | | | | . 32 |

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